

A FREELANCE IN KASHMIR

A TALE OF THE GREAT ANARCHY

BY

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SECOND EDITION

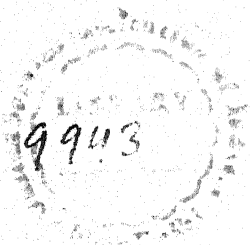
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INTRODUCTION

THE following romance is a story of the latter days of "The Great Anarchy," a name which has been given to the years following the death of the Emperor Aurangzebe and the dismemberment of the Mogul Empire to the bringing of peace to a distracted country by the rise of the English. In 1707 died Aurangzebe, the last of the great Emperors of Delhi. From that date the Empire crumbled as province after province fell away and one upstart after another tried to rule the puppet throne. Ever from the North, Persian and Afghan poured into the land, and the whole of Hindostan became a vast camp, in which each and all fought for his own hand, and the unhappy peasantry never knew who would reap the crops they had sown and tended. The last fifty years of the eighteenth century saw a small host of Europeans take service with the various contending chiefs, and even carve principalities for themselves. They organized the forces of chiefs on European lines, and contended with one another in opposing ranks. English, French, American, Italian, and Dutch, from runaway sailor to refugee Chevalier, their histories are packed with romance, adventure, and tragedy. Just before Lord Lake and General Arthur Wellesley crushed the power of the great Maratha usurpers of the Mogul throne, and broke up the Maratha Confederacy, the Savoyard De Boigne in the service of the Maharajah Scindiah had organized a

large force on the Company's model. He had formed an officer's cadre with even a cadet service, recruited from Europeans of many races. The half-breed children of English officials and their Indian wives found a career in this service, notably James Skinner, the famous "old Sikander." Among the "freelances" as they were called were the Skinners, De Boigne, Perron, the Chevalier Dudrenac, George Thomas of Hansi, Walter Reinhart, nicknamed *Sombre* (corrupted into *Somru*), Hyder Hearsey, and many another, while in somewhat later days there were the officers in the service of Runjeet Singh, of whom Avitabile, Allard Ventura and Van Cortland were the best known.

To the fascination of the days of the Freelance proper, i.e. the last decades of the eighteenth century, must be added the traces of the Christian tradition, the strange legend of the Tomb of Christ in Kashmir, and the initials of the Cross on the Kashmir rupee, born of Jesuit travel. Behind, and yet mingling with this again, the Afghan origin, the descent from Saul, the tomb of the prophet Lamech with that curious and almost modern report of the presence of "Dan and the half of Manassah" in Bactria, with all the hint of Judaism that it involves. Then as a background to it all the ever-green memory, in village mouths to this day, of the great coming of Alexander of Macedon.

India is full of so much that strikes old broken chords to memory.

"Some arms deep rusted, an old-world rhyme,
A broken idol, a ruined fane."

G. F. M.

September, 1914,

GAZETTEER AND GLOSSARY

Abdalli . .	. Another name for the Duranni race.
Amarnath . .	. Caves in the Liddar Valley in Kashmir.
Baltistan . .	. A mountain district north of Kashmir.
Badakshan . .	. A province in Central Asia, Afghanistan.
Bākshi . .	. Paymaster.
Bānāfra . .	. Violet.
Begum . .	. A Muhammadan lady's title (fem. of Beg).
Ben-i-Israel . .	. Children of Israel, a title claimed by the Duranni tribes.
Bij Bihara . .	. An old Mogul garden in the Jhelum in Kashmir.
Birmal . .	. A district in Afghanistan south of Ghuzni.
Black Mountain . .	. A mass of mountains east of Peshawur and south of the Indus.
Būrka . .	. Cloak covering head and body, with eye holes.
Burzil . .	. A pass leading from Kashmir to the Gilgit province.
Champāk . .	. A heavily scented flower of a tree.
Chib . .	. A Rajpoot tribe of the Punjab hills.
Chikor . .	. A mountain bird of partridge type.
Chilki rupee . .	. A Kashmiri rupee.
Chirāg . .	. Flat earthen dish with a wick, as a lamp.
Chīt . .	. A note.
Chilas . .	. A village and district on the Indus above the Black Mountain.
Cheneni . .	. A small Rajpoot state and town in the Pir Panjal.

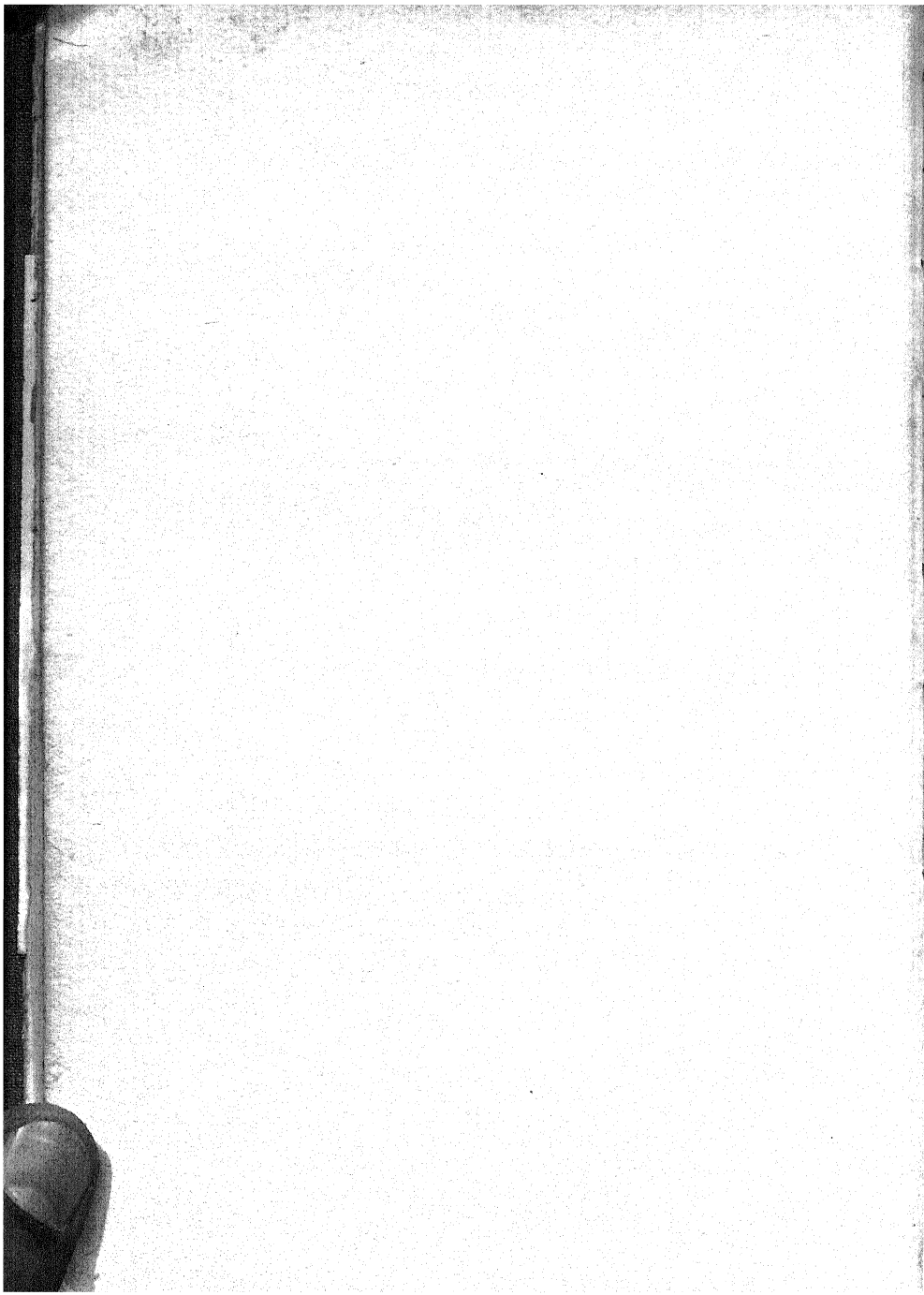
- Churel . . . The ghost of a woman who had died at childbirth.
- Cossid . . . A mounted messenger.
- Dardistan . . . The country of the Dards, north of Kashmir.
- Darel . . . A wild mountain district north of the Indus, and west of Gilgit.
- Duffedar . . . A sergeant of cavalry.
- Duranni . . . The name of the ruling race in Afghanistan.
- Dole! . . . A long Afghan drum.
- Ekka . . . A one-horse cart.
- Euzufzai . . . The Sons of Joseph; a group of tribes in the mountains about Peshawur.
- Fauj . . . Troops.
- Gāngābāl . . . A sacred lake near Haramukh.
- Ghāt . . . Steps on a river bank; a ford.
- Ghee . . . Clarified butter.
- Gilgit . . . A town and province between Kashmir and the Pamirs.
- Ghazi . . . A fanatical swordsman.
- Ghor . . . A mountainous district of Southern Afghanistan.
- Gurais . . . A beautiful valley and village in Kashmir.
- Hazara . . . A district near the Black Mountain; also a Mongol race in Afghanistan.
- Hara-mukh . . . A mountain in Kashmir.
- Hari Parbat . . . A fortified hill overlooking Srinagar.
- Hāndi . . . A bill of exchange.
- Huqa . . . An Eastern pipe, or hubble bubble.
- Huzoor . . . Lit. "Presence." A title of respect.
- Jaghir . . . Land granted in perpetuity on the feudal system.
- Jellabis . . . Jumbles (a sweetmeat).
- Jezail . . . An Afghan matchlock.
- Jhok . . . A homestead.
- Jihad . . . A religious war of Islam.

Jirgah . . .	The representative assembly of tribal elders.
Jowan . . .	A young man.
Kafila . . .	A caravan.
Kamri . . .	A pass in Kashmir alternative to the Burzil.
Kanzilwan . . .	A village at the foot of the Kamri pass.
Kazilbash . . .	Persians settled in Afghanistan.
Kābāb . . .	Lumps of meat cooked on a skewer.
Kālā Takā . . .	Black Mountain.
Kasid or Cossid . . .	A mounted messenger.
Karewa . . .	An alluvial plateau in Kashmir through which a river has cut its bed.
Khagan . . .	A valley in the mountains west of Kashmir.
Khagwani . . .	One of the Duranni clans.
Khassadar . . .	Militia-man.
Khistwar . . .	A district in the Pir Panjal.
Kirri . . .	The camp of a nomadic tribe.
Kishengunga . . .	A river of Kashmir running into the Jhelum.
Kommadan . . .	Commandant.
Kothi . . .	A house.
Kotwal . . .	Police magistrate.
Lascar . . .	A gunner; literally a soldier.
Lashkar . . .	An army.
Linga-lingum . . .	A stone; phallic emblem.
Lolab . . .	A beautiful valley in Kashmir, colonized by Afghans.
Lūngi . . .	A form of turban.
Malik . . .	A headman.
Mhanji . . .	A rower; boatman.
Mogul . . .	The Mongolian race who conquered India under Baber.
Mooltan . . .	An Afghan city, in what is now the Southern Punjab.
Moolah . . .	A Muhammadan priest.
Muezzin . . .	The priest or mosque servant who calls the faithful to prayer.

- Pathan . . . People who speak the Pushtoo; tribesman of the hills between Afghanistan and India.
 Pandav . . . An ancient Indian fabulous race of kings.
 Pawindah or } A nomad race with centre about Ghuzni.
 Powandah }
 Peris . . . Beautiful females of paradise.
 Pir Panjal . . . The great snowy spurs of the Himalaya which separate Kashmir from the Punjab.
 Rafzi . . . A heretic.
 Rajpoot . . . Literally Sons of Kings; one of the great ruling Aryan races of India.
 Rissalah . . . A squadron, or corps of cavalry.
 Sanad . . . A treaty.
 Salaam . . . Peace; a salutation.
 Serai . . . A hostel.
 Shapiyon . . . A village in Kashmir, close to the Pir Panjal.
 Shārbat . . . A drink.
 Shikāra . . . A skiff.
 Sirdar . . . Chief; officer.
 Sind . . . A tributary of the Jhelum.
 Subahdar . . . A military rank = captain or governor.
 Suddozai . . . The clan royal of the Durannis.
 Surnai . . . An Afghan reed pipe.
 Swami . . . A Hindu ascetic recluse.
 Tazi . . . A swift breed of horses.
 Tangir . . . A wild mountain district near Gilgit.
 Tehsildar . . . Head of a parish.
 Toorkoman . . . Men of Toork races of Central Asia, of whom many had come to India with the various invaders from the North.
 Verinag . . . An old royal palace and temple in Kashmir.
 Wazir . . . Vizier; minister.
 Zogi La . . . A pass out of Kashmir towards Thibet.

SINCE the nomenclature of the characters in an Indian romance is always puzzling to the reader, a list of the persons mentioned by name is given here.

DAVID FRASER	.	The hero of the story, son of an officer of the Bengal Artillery and an Afghan mother.
LUCIUS TONE	.	An ex-Artillery Sergeant.
JEAN ARMANDE PLESSIS	DU }	A Jesuit Priest.
GANESHA SINGH	.	A Rajpoot native officer.
NIHAL SINGH	.	A Rajpoot native non-commissioned officer.
GUL JAN	.	David Fraser's Afghan orderly.
SALABAT KHAN	.	The Governor of Kashmir.
YAR KHAN	.	His Wazir.
HABIB ULLAH	.	Commandant of his bodyguard.
ALTAMISH	.	A Toork noble.
WALI DAD	.	An agent of his.
DAOUD SHAH	.	An Afghan, generalissimo of the Begum Somru's army; a mysterious character.
INAYAT ULLAH	.	Commandant of the palace at Srinagar.
ALLAHDAD KHAN	.	A soldier of the Chib tribe.
DUNDOO	.	Infant son of Allah Visayah.
THE BEGUM SOMRU	.	An Indian princess well known to history.
THE LADY MIRIAM	.	A sister of Salabat Khan.
THE LADY NUR JAN	}	Wives of Salabat Khan.
THE BIBI ALANA		
THE BEGUM ALLAH VISAYAH	}	A notorious courtesan of Srinagar.
AZIZUN	.	A famous dancer.
AMAH	.	Miriam's old nurse.



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CHAPTER I

THE BEGUM SOMRU'S CAMP

THE hour of high twelve boomed across the plain of the Jumna Kadir as the great brass field-piece *Malik-i-maidan* (the Lord of the battlefield) fired its midday charge in the *campo* of the Begum Somru, after the custom of the English. Her Highness was the Company *Bahadur's* very good friend for several excellent reasons. The first reason was that it eminently suited her interests; and the second one was that she had had tender passages with sturdy English George Thomas of Hansi, which had taken out of her mouth the bad taste left by her lawful spouse, evil Walter Reinhart, nicknamed *Sombre*. A third was that she had just had a satisfactory interview with the English Commander-in-Chief, General Gerald Lake, who had beaten the Marathas and their French-trained army at Delhi.

It was true that the gallant General had received her in full Durbar and had kissed her before the assembled officers, to their no small delight, the which had taken some explaining to her retinue. She had, however, succeeded in conveying the impression that it was a mark of very great favour among the English,

and that it had nothing whatever to do with the General's good lunch.

The army of Her Highness consisted of a mixed brigade of all arms, horse, foot, and artillery, a *rissalah* * of horse of mixed nationality, two battalions of footmen, one with muskets presented by the English, and one armed with the matchlock of the country side; and lastly, the pride of every chieftain, the park of artillery. Her Highness's park of artillery was not a very formidable one. There were two light threes that the Company had presented her as galloper guns, two rickety nines, and the pride of the *campo*, the great brass eighteen-pounder carronade that had just boomed forth high twelve.

The *campo* was arranged in an irregular square, the horse on one side, the foot on the opposite one, a third occupied by the park of artillery with the Begum's tents beyond. A peepal tree in the fore ground, a ruined shrine at its foot, with irregular clumps of mimosa round the edges of the camp completed the scene, and away in the distance, the white buttress of the Himalaya, shimmered in the noonday sun, and a dust devil danced widdershins down the track hard by.

But though it was the hour of midday rest, for some reason the army slept not, and a hum of voices permeated the camp. Something had annoyed the soldiery, and that something was no less than empty pockets. Pockets so empty that even tobacco was wanting, and it was little avail to swagger past the house on the wall in the town they saw across the fields, for who cared for an empty-handed swash-buckler ruffle he never so bravely. Times had been bad with the Begum Somru, the Maratha had ravaged half her estates, and rents were overdue, and the

* A cavalry corps.

army was six months in arrears in the way of pay. Moreover, they were still camped in the Company's territory, and there was no living on the merchant and the peasant, as Eastern soldiers should. The army of Her Highness had therefore been in a bad humour these two months past, and matters had reached a climax, brought on perhaps by the jeers of the mercenary fair in the bazaars of the neighbouring town. Possibly, too, the commandant of the force, a lean hungry Afghan, might have had something to do with it, at any rate the army had emerged from its tents and hummed round the *sham-ianah* of their lady the Begum Somru, with little show of decorum, and many murmurings. Her Highness had come out discreetly veiled, but inwardly raging, to meet her turbulent crew, and now faced them as the brass eighteen boomed out the time of day. But, alas! for the danger of suggestion. Big brass *Malik-i-maidan* had been standing in the sun for five full hours, and was very nearly red hot. Some wag had seen the fun of it, the idea had flown apace. "*Sit her on the breech till she pays,*" had been the suggestion and, alas for royalty flouted! that dissolute soldiery then and there had seized her and hoisted her astride the gun. As the hot metal burnt through the thin muslin trousers, Her Highness gave forth a shriek of rage and pain, and as she did so the laughing crowd were torn asunder and a tall English figure, in a yellow laced jacket and dragoon helmet, swung the Begum from her humiliating seat, lay around him with a heavy iron-shod stick, and thrust his pistol into the face of one who made to draw his sword. Behind, half a dozen mounted men in yellow with drawn swords followed the man in the helmet, making their horses kick and prance to clear a gangway. Then, as the crowd hung back to study the

apparition, up strode the commandant, laying about him right and left and showering oaths of the forcible Afghan variety, and the soldiery slunk away, at the shouts of "To your tents."

Her Highness lent wearily on the Englishman's arm, while two of her girls cowered behind her. The yellow troopers sat their horses behind the *sahib*, Daoud Shah, the Afghan, sheathed his sword with a slam, and men of Her Highness's own guards ran up. The army had melted away. "So Daoud Shah of the Ben-i-Israel," quoth the Begum; "this is how you can command an army, and this is how you arrive late to help me. By all the prophets of all the people of all the Books, I have had enough of this, see you to it that the punishments are suitable, and think who there be in this army that seek your place. The *Bijli Rissalah*, and the *Fateh Pultan*, march in this afternoon, with Mian Sunnayat Singh at their head. And you, sir," turning to the young Englishman, "you are the young *sahib*, who came last night with a troop of horse seeking service, whom I am to see in audience this evening. *Khush ameded*,* indeed, and my thanks for bringing these dogs to their senses. I will receive you at sunset; till then you have leave to go, but let six of your men guard my tent, to teach this crew their places. Ho Daoud Shah! with Sunnayat Singh comes the *bakhshi*,† see that the troops know it." And the Begum withdrew to her tents.

The Afghan and the Englishmen looked each other in the face, as men of the north should, till the Afghan bit his lip and dropped his eye and the *sahib* turned on his heel and strode to his tent, to turn out the guard for Her Highness's tents. Six stalwart troopers, turned out like English dragoons with clean arms and

* Welcome.

† Pay-master.

well fitting accoutrements, yet loose enough in their Eastern frocks, were duly posted, and David Fraser sat him down in his tent to take stock of the day's doings, and to consider the next move.

And the next move was by no means an easy one, for Eastern potentates love not to be found in humiliation, and it is not always the saviour that receives the favour. When, too, to the caprice of the East is added that of the feminine, it may take the best wits to turn the situation to advantage. So while David Fraser rests in the noonday heat and turns over the strange situation in which he found himself, it will be as well to review the circumstances which brought that young soldier so opportunely into the *campo* of Her Highness the Begum Somru, relict of that unprincipled adventurer referred to, and recently obligated ally of the Marquis Wellesley, the East India Company *Bahadur* and their master His Majesty King George.

In the year of Grace, 1804, David Fraser, the hero of this story, was twenty-three years of age, the son of Major Andrew David Fraser of Lagg of the Hon. E. I. C.'s Bengal Artillery, and the Sultana Aluri Suddozai, his lawful wife.

The '45 had left a ruined tower at Lagg, and a penniless lad to be brought up by an uncle to a cadetship in the Company's Artillery, with few ties to draw that same lad back from the East. So when the Rohilla War and fate had enabled him to rescue from some irregular troopers the beautiful daughter of an Afghan leader of horse, who had ridden from Ghuzni to seek his fortune in the plains of Hindostan, he married her then and there by all the rites available, and she rode at his side in camp and leaguer for many a year. Little David had seen the light in the guard-room of the gateway of a Maratha hill fort, and lived

his first three years at the saddle bow, till the march of peace and the red line on the map had brought his parents to anchor in cantonments. If to the ancient highland blood of the Frasers you add that of the still older stock of the Jewish princes from the mountains of Ghor, you may fairly reckon on getting blue blood and pride of race and high courage for your pains. The Sultana, like any other high-bred Afghan, was little darker than her husband, and young David's swarthinness was of the slightest, while his clean-cut profile and lofty forehead proclaimed him as well born as a man could wish to be. The mother had brought the lad up as a horseman, and a man at arms, and before she died, when he was twelve years of age, had entered unsolicited into the faith of her husband, peacefully changing the crescent for the Cross, and dying happily under its shadow. Andrew Fraser in his middle age had developed the Presbyterian strain of his family, and had brought up his son with far more care than was then usually bestowed on those children reared in India. He had intended that he also should join the Company's service, and to this end had taught the willing lad much of his own stock of lore in guns and gunnery. An old Irish batman of the major's had added to young David's education, by imparting a cheery and simple philosophy that has brought peace to so many of the sons of Erin. To the sterner Calvinism of the old Scot, the trustful leaven of the illiterate Irishman was a curious and not unfruitful addition. The "Glory be to God, sorr," and the "Praise the Virgin, sorr," that rose to the old soldier's lips at almost every discussion, mellowed in the lad's mind the sterner doctrine of his father's Presbyterian teaching. It was more of the "Old Hundred" than of the "*Quare fremuerunt.*" It had been a happy childhood, the stern and kindly father, the beautiful

sad and fierce-eyed mother, the old servant, his play-mate, and a foster-mother and nurse from the Deccan, all devoted to the child, who had grown up tall and straight and truthful. He suffered, however, from occasional moods of melancholy, the sure legacy of a mountain race behind him on both sides, and now and again had given way to wild bursts of passion, which grew fewer as he had grown older. The mother would speak of a terrible grandfather, a prince and a ruler in Ghor, who had never spared man in his wrath, while there were strong-willed, fierce men enough away down the Fraser genealogy to account for plenty of wayward temper.

At the age of sixteen young David Fraser had grown to be as likely a lad as a father could wish to see, and the dark blood in his veins merely bestowed on him the complexion of any dark-haired man of Gael. So according to his father's wishes the lad went, by favour of the Directors, to the Cadet College at Barasset, there to receive his military training. Trouble had ensued soon enough, for young David had half killed two brother cadets who had taunted him with his colour, and had left the college then and there, and turned up at Chunar where his father was quartered, with his mind set on consorting no more with the young English of the H. E. I. Company's service. Andrew Fraser had then confided him to an old friend in DeBoigne's French trained army, that served the Gwalior State, and a cadetship under DeBoigne had soon led to a cornetcy of irregular horse. The DeBoigne corps were as systematically organized as the Company's, and many an officer had put his country-born sons to service there, since the pure blood Saxon would have none of them. But then it is not every officer of the Indian army who had formed a union with a princess of the house of Ghor,

and half the blood that runs in the veins of the half-breed children was often poor enough. In the service of Scindiah were courtly French officers of the *Ancien Régime* side by side with the most scoundrelly European adventurers of every nationality, but the strong rule of General DeBoigne had kept these gentry in their proper place, and the service was one in which honour and renown was to be won, with little of the evil that prevailed in the adventurer forces of other Indian rulers.

So the boy found himself under that prince among the old irregulars, James Skinner the famous half-breed, like himself the son of a Company's officer, and soon became as good a leader of a troop of *Goorcheras* as could be found in India. With the departure of M. DeBoigne, and the advent to power of General Perron, Scindiah's service soon lost its prestige, and the Maratha league against the English and the Marquis Wellesley, brought nothing but rue. The English-born officers left the service, and Captain Fraser with a small following had set off to seek his fortune among the princes not at war with the English.

As Generals Lake and Wellesley steadily broke the power of the great Maratha confederacy in a series of victories that created a universal respect for British arms and British prestige, Fraser watched it all from a distance with mingled pride and bitterness. Pride in being the son of his father, bitterness that narrow prejudice had driven him from being among the victors—bitterness that any man should dare look down on him for the mother's share in his breeding. Letters from his father came to him from time to time with money remittances, with news of the war and its progress, in which, however, Andrew Fraser was not engaged. Then had come a break without letters, and at last the news from an old friend of the family that

Major Fraser had died, leaving apparently little but his personal property, which was now stored awaiting the son's instructions.

And so David Fraser, alone in the world, with little but his sword by his side, and his uniform of Skinner's Irregulars, had set out to fend for himself for the rest of his life, alone, but undaunted. Miniatures by a Delhi artist of his father and mother, a pair of beautiful flint pistols that had been out with his grandfather in the '45, and a Bible, were all of his outer connection with the European world, when fate had brought him seeking service in the *campo* of the Begum Somru.

So reflecting in some sort on the happy past in his father's house, and on the ventures of the day, the hours of the hot afternoon passed away, without, however, any solution as to his future line of conduct, or how he should comport himself in the forthcoming interview with the princess. Now princesses, black or white, or for the matter of that women of any kind, had not come within the curriculum of his father's scheme of upbringing, while he had set forth into the world too early in life to see much of English society. Somewhere had he read that you could not go far wrong in life if you struck a man and kissed a woman, whenever you met them, but the rule hardly seemed to apply in this case, at least so far as the Begum was concerned. Danny Irvine, his father's batman, had other and quaint views regarding the eternal feminine, which he had been wont to communicate at times in the hour when he sucked at a dilapidated clay, but they, too, hardly met the case. So about the time that young David had come to the decision that it would be best to wait on circumstance, his orderly arrived to announce that his namesake, Daoud Shah, the commander of all the Begum's *campo*, was about

to pay him a visit of ceremony. Now Fraser had intended to comply with that formality during the morning, and had sent to the neighbouring town for a suitable offering of fruit that might serve as his visiting card, after the manner of the East. The events of the morning, however, had frustrated that intention, and now contrary to precedent here was the commander-in-chief calling first, from which it might be opined that the latter regarded Fraser as a man who for the moment, at any rate, was of some considerable importance. All of which Fraser was such sufficiently versed in the ways of the East to thoroughly understand and appraise at its proper value. "Welcome, welcome, my lord," said he, "to this humble one's shanty," as his excellency entered with a suitable salutation. "Peace be with you and yours," and the two seated themselves on the rug spread over the dusty floor of the tent. When the prolonged inquiries after each other's health had been made, it was not so easy to discover a topic of conversation, and Fraser had an opportunity to scan more closely the sardonic features of his visitor. The Afghan face is almost always a Jewish one, though here and there there may be some trace of the old Greek strain from Bactria, and Daoud Shah's features were Jewish in the extreme. To a high forehead and almost hooked nose, were added deep-set, piercing eyes with a queer haunting look of apprehension at the back of them, and heavy lowering eyebrows that completed an exceptionally sinister effect. A skin deeply cut and lined with a thin, dark beard and moustache flecked with grey, completed his countenance. A dark blue *puggari* hid his black hair, and the rest of his costume was of the usual flowing type of the Afghan gentry, while round his waist was a leather belt with a pistol and long straight

knife therein. The visitor's speech, however, was pleasant enough, and he talked of the politics of Hindostan with a detached air that gave an interesting appearance of inner knowledge. There was no reference as to what he much wished to know, viz. the young Englishman's exact business and what had brought him to the camp at all.

In the East, however, a visit of ceremony is not protracted for long, and the Afghan soon left with an invitation to come sup with him that evening which Fraser accepted willingly enough, with a mental note to remember the long spoon, that precept recommended for such occasions. Then when the Afghan took his departure his orderly arrived to help him dress for his interview with Her Highness. Fraser, at no time a sloven, and imbued with a young man's natural desire to look his best, understood well enough when a man should be suitably attired. He would visit the Begum in full dress, so far as an adventurer officer could have such, and he put on his uniform as an officer of Skinner's Irregular Horse in the service of Scindiah, with a British dragoon helmet atop. This consisted of a loose yellow tunic with embroidered collar cut low at the neck, pieces of chain mail on the shoulders to turn a sword cut, and Kashmir-embroidered cuffs. In those days even, the irregulars in the Company's service wore the *kurta*, and all the more so in Scindiah's. Under the loose tunic were loose yellow cotton breeches tucked into high loose jack boots, *a la Marechal Turenne*, and round the waist a crimson embroidered sash with hanging ends, and a stout sambher skin sword belt, outside. From the belt hung a curved French dragoon sabre, and the two ancestral flint pistols therein completed our hero's *grand tenue*, and very effective it was, and a pity that his mother could not have seen him in it.

For Fraser, though he knew it not, possessed that gift of the gods, a way with him that led straight to women's hearts, and none the less so for his gallant figure in his bravery. And so wondering what might be in store for him, his hand on his hip and his sabre trailing, David Fraser adventurer, set forth to visit the Begum Somru.

CHAPTER II

SHATRANJ-BAZI

OUTSIDE the tent the encampment presented a lively appearance, for the corps under Mian Sunnayat Singh had marched in, and it was "the hour of the kine," when the flocks coming home raised long trails of dust in the evening gloom. The horses of the *campo* were passing backwards and forwards to their evening watering at the tank across the road. The sun dipping on the horizon just glinted on a peak of the Himalaya that was visible above the dust, and a flight of *kulan* were screaming overhead. Fraser strode over to the Begum's tents accompanied by his orderly and his troop *duffedar*, one Nihal Singh, a handsome veteran Rajpoot, who had served in many services for over thirty years, but could not resist the glamour of the tented life. As they approached Her Highness's quarters, the guard turned out to give a ragged salute, a sure sign of which way the cat might jump, since who would salute an unknown *feringhi* adventurer without good cause.

An officer of the household received the Englishman, and let him into the large two-poled tent in which the Begum half veiled and clothed in crimson silk, sat waiting to receive him, with two of her maids behind her. The official who received him left him at the

entrance, and the Begum's voice broke the silence which followed on the military salute which Fraser had given her. "Fraser *Sahib*," said a mellow and not displeasing voice, "you are indeed welcome. Come and sit on this stool and tell me what brings you to my camp, and if I can befriend you." And Fraser drew near to where Her Highness sat on a small low divan covered with cushions, and close to which stood another and smaller stool. "Fraser *Sahib*," again said Her Highness, "I have ordered you to be admitted to see me privately, and have sent away my attendants all save these two girls. I have to thank you for your assistance against those insolent troopers this day, and I would speak to you of other matters also. Come you from the camp of General Lake *Sahib*?"

"I do not, your Highness," said Fraser. "I come from Rajputana seeking service as a freelance, and to make my fortune, for I have little else save my sword, and I have never been in the Company *Bahadur's* service."

"Tell me, then," said the Begum, "how you come to be roaming Hindostan, for I see you are English and not French, and therefore belong to the ruling race of much of this country, how is it you are not a *Sahib* of the army, for you look a soldier born, I meet French officers, and other Franks but not the English unless they be sons of officers with Indian mothers."

"There is no reason I should not tell your Highness. My father was an officer in the Company's Artillery, and my mother was a Duranni of Ghor, daughter of Ghaour Khan the Rohilla, who came out of Ghuzni to follow Nadir Shah the Persian."

"Ah, then I have heard of you, for I knew your grandfather, and years after met your father, with

the Sirkar's troops at Allahabad, and a proper man he was. He came at the Resident's request to look at my cannon, and they told he had married a Duranni lady. It would be better if more *Sahibs* married well-born women, than mate as they do, with the sluts from the bazaar. Also I think I have heard of you. Was it you who held the Tantri pass two years ago, with the Rajah of Dhond's troops against the Chevalier Dudrenac and Scindiah's best battalions you with some of James Secunder's troopers? Then I have long hoped to give you service, if you came my way, but not yet. I have other matters in hand at present to which your presence will not help."

And the Begum's glance for all that fell admiringly on this strong, well-knit young man, who sat beside her.

"I have, however, a mission for which I need a faithful messenger, are you willing to serve me and take your chance of what reward I can give you? It is not much, I dare promise, since things in Hindostan are more than unsettled. See here. The Afghans seek once more to invade the Punjab, and drive back the Sikhs, who have ousted the Abdalli, and regain Ahmad Shah's empire. It is important that a message connected with this should be sent to Salabut Khan, the Duranni governor of Kashmir, and it is important that some one I can trust should be with the Afghans that I may know when these Sikhs are to be put in their place, and what I am to do, and whether I am to have a fair share of land north of Delhi. I can trust an Englishman, even when he has Afghan blood in him, and I now ask if you will serve me in this matter. Later on I may want you here. There is no room for you and Daoud Shah in this *campo* together, and for my present purpose Daoud Shah must remain." And the lady stopped, for long speech is rare in

the Oriental, and this had been far beyond her wont.

To David Fraser the vista of adventure thus opened up was attractive enough. He had long wanted to see something of his Afghan kin, while to the young mind Kashmir sounded a fairy land as it had done to the Mogul Emperors who had made it their summer playground. His answer, therefore, to the Begum's proposal was a hearty acquiescence, which helped to strengthen her in her reliance on the fidelity of her new servant.

"Very well, then, Fraser *Sahib*," said she. "I will therefore give you a letter to Salabat Khan, recommending him to give you service, and telling him that you are entirely in my confidence. You in your turn must serve my interest there, and contrive to keep me informed of the Afghan plans for the reconquest of Upper India. You must also explain that they must take good care to avoid coming into contest with the English, against whom even their might will fail. That they must fully realize that, and that I and many of us here have made allies with the Company, and will on no account quarrel with them. I shall march my *campo* towards Meerut to-morrow, and you should march off north at the same time, but tell no one where you are going. I will also give you a note on the bankers in Lahore or Sialkote for five hundred rupees, and another on Srinagar for a thousand. It is, of course, by serving Salabat Khan that you will be able to support your horse, and I hope he will order you to raise him a whole *rissalah*. You may be sure that if ever I can serve you I will, but I cannot engage you here. You don't suppose that Daoud Shah will forgive you for intervening to-day. And Daoud Shah, villain though I know him to be, is too useful to me to dismiss at present. It will be best

for you to tell him that my terms to you have not been inviting enough for you to accept."

When Fraser had expressed his complete understanding of what was required of him, the Begum continued—

"Well, now that that is settled, tell me of your own life and your father the clever Fraser *Sahib*, who came to see my gun park, many years ago."

And the lad, seeing that he had apparently made a friend, told her so much as would interest her and that she might safely know, and after some conversation the Begum bade him leave her, lest too long an interview should excite comment and jealousy in camp.

"Before you go, *Sahib*, you shall kiss my hand, as they tell me the English *Sahibs* do to great English ladies, so strange are your Feringhi customs."

And David did as he was bid, and a plump, small hand it was, scented with sandal wood and the nails dyed in henna, for the Begum, elderly though she was, had preserved more of the comeliness of youth than usual in the East. A comely amiable soul he thought, good to serve probably, and perhaps not strong enough to hold her own in a distracted country in which the hand must keep the head. But there was little enough of weakness in all she had said to him he was feign to confess to himself as he strolled away from her tent. Some of the stories in the countryside that were told of her, argued little of feminine weakness, such as the plump hand in itself might indicate. There was, for instance, that story of the erring handmaid buried alive beneath her mistress's bed as a punishment and a warning. . . . But then once again who sups with the devil needs a long spoon, and *campos* and Indian states are none so easy to manage. So reflecting, David drew near to his own

tent there only to get into more comfortable clothing and give orders for the march.

But the morrow's march needed little preparation. David's small body of horse were used to the road, and the three pony carts that accompanied him carried all the baggage with space to spare. A few words to the native *ressaldar*, who under him commanded the cavalry troop, would be all that was required. This troop of horsemen that followed the will of David Fraser were a mixed lot chosen by himself. At their head was old Ganesha Singh, a Rajput of Oudh, who had served with his father in the artillery, and led half a dozen men of his own clan. Rajputs of the Agnicular or Fire clans were they, as distinct from the Rajput races of the Sun and Moon. Fiercely proud of race, all the more so, perhaps, that the genuine Rajput descent of the fire races is a matter of dispute among pundits, willing and eager to follow a leader, amenable to discipline, born horsemen, and swordsmen, exactly the right leaven for a young leader of horse to temper a mixed troop of *Schwartzreiters*. Next to Ganesha Singh came Nihal Singh the *Duffedar*, a Rajput of the Moon from the Dogra hills. The rest consisted of half a dozen Afghans, two from the Afghan hills, the rest settled in Rohilcund for two generations, two Muhammadans from the Punjab, also of a Rajput clan, whom the march of Islam had included in its grasp by force of arms. This had been the fate of all the northern clans except those whom the valleys and buttresses of the Himalaya had sheltered. Two Marathas from the Deccan and three Mogul lads from near Delhi, completed the major portion of this troop of twenty soldiers of fortune. Among the six Afghans was old Gul Jan the Duranni, who had been his mother's henchman and his father's orderly, and nursed young David as a child and taught him to

ride and use the sword. Grizzled and hard bitten; his close cropped beard died red in imitation of the traditional red beard of the prophet, there was a jaunty air about the angle of his cocked head-dress, and in the lilt of his mountaineer gait, that spoke of plenty of resource and daring left in the old frame yet.

Many a delightful tale of rapine and of war had Gul Jan told David in his youth, and the old man worshipped the lad. Of all the evil tales that an Afghan life could boast of, the one that had best pleased the young highlander, for highland he was on both sides, had been one of Gul Jan's boyhood. Two villages had long been at feud, and once Gul Jan and half a dozen urchins of one village, had caught a child of the other village alone, and had then and there stretched his little wizand and slit it with a pen knife or some kindred and insufficient weapon. It was just that sort of tale, that would go straight to a boy's heart, and for its sake as much as his general faithful service, the David held the old redbeard very dear. He called to the old man to come help him get ready to sup with his namesake, Daoud Shah, the *Sipahsalar** of the Begum's *campo*, and accompany him to the latter's tent. A loose white frock, over his breeches, boots and belt with pistol holster, and a Kashmir embroidered loungi on his head completed David's evening attire, and with Gul Jan swaggering behind him he strolled over to the Afghan's tent, to be received with considerable show of ceremony. As the ways of a camp are simple, the two soldiers sat themselves down to the evening meal forthwith, to *kabab's* and curds and cinnamon stew and the best of unleavened *chappattis*. Round the length and breadth of Hindustan the conversation wandered, and

* Commander-in-Chief.

David told his host enough of his history to explain how he fought for his own hand, and carried not King George's commission. They talked of soldiers and of cannon, of border forays and rival kings, and now and again the Afghan would vouchsafe such glimpse of a chequered life as made the other's blood run cold in his veins. Daoud Shah would hint of having come down the Gomal with Timur the lame Tartar, founder of the Mogul Line, and seemed conversant with sacks of Delhi far earlier in the ages, and of all the evil the world had ever known. The Greeks in their Central Asian kingdoms, and the life history of Balk and Samarkand, and how the tribe of Gad and a half of Manasseh had come to settle near the latter city. A great traveller, a great historian, or a great romancer certainly, and as David sat silent listening to the snatches of the other's experience, and looked into the deep-knit brow, and deep-set eyes, with the clear-cut, hawked nose and sharp chin, a feeling almost of terror and certainly of aversion seized him. Here was a man to whom half the horrors of the world seemed familiar with none of the ruth that horrors should stir. Then with the meal ended, and the *huga* finished, they sat themselves down almost instinctively to play at *Shatranj-bazi* or chess, on a board laid out on a low lacquered stool. Chess has come to us from the East, like the horse and the rose and many another wonder, and the great marvel of all, the Christian Revelation, and though David had learnt the game as a European from his father, he knew something of the Persian variations. True to the Asiatic conception of women, the English queen is there called the *Wazir*, or minister, which fairly explains the subordinate character of the king. A king in the hands of his minister is a well-known Eastern phenomenon. Our bishop, in the East is

the ambassador, with the power of diagonal move, and significantly so, since never could an Eastern ambassador move straight forward to save his life, which is just why, now and again, the simple English succeed in diplomacy where the Eastern fails. Among the chessmen our castle alone retains its Persian name. *Ruk* is Persian for a tower, and to this day in England men call the castle the rook.

For two hours the pair played in silence, the Afghan gazing now and again up from his board and under his eyebrows at the eager set face of David Fraser, his namesake. David and Dawad or Daoud are the same. At last David's King had rest from his labours. His hour had come. "Pharoah is dead," called Daoud with the low hiss of a serpent in his words. "Mate it is right enough," admitted namesake David, "but why is Pharoah dead?"

"Pshaw!" returned the other, "What matters an expression. In Egypt this was the royal game. Who kills Pharoah or encompasses his death wins the throne."

"Where is it that this man has not been," thought the younger man. "But there are no Pharoahs now." And he lent back on his cushions and looked up into his late opponent's face. Then he looked again. What fascination in those grey-green eyes! What was the man staring for? And the Afghan moved, and David looked again. Involuntarily he made a gesture in return. Then the Afghan lent forward and looked him straight in the face again and said—

"Have you seen the letters of the lost word re-arranged?"

David started. Old Major Fraser had belonged to the first Masonic Lodge in India that had been started at Vellore in early days. He had been master and sat in the chair of Royal Solomon of a lodge in Upper India, and had initiated his son David full young. In

the lad the ancient rites had struck some chord in the Jewish strain that came through his mother from the Afghans of Ghor. David had been eager to see more of the mysteries, and his father had enlightened him. Therefore, when he suddenly found this Afghan asking him searching questions concerning the word that the High Priest of the Temple at Jerusalem alone dare say, his earlier experiences came back clearly, and he marvelled, aye, and feared somewhat. With those searching eyes fixed on him some answer seemed needed.

"I have," said David.

"Will you prove it to me."

"I will not," said the younger man. "How do I know that you know?"

"Pish, lad! How do I know? Why, boy, I saw the Romans enter the city, I saw the streets run red with blood, and I saw the starving mothers devouring their own children."

David watched him now in amazement.

"So that is one of the reasons why I know how the letters should be arranged. See that you never forget, nor how the High Priest does it." And a change came over his face, and the tense look left it. "Ah, well, *Ferassa Sahib*, it has been a great pleasure to entertain you. Pharoah is dead and turned to dust, so have a sharbat to drink and let us rest."

So David took his leave, relieved to be out of sight of those piercing eyes, and their horrible glimpses of worlds dead and gone. At any rate, *his* connection with Judah dated from a period long before the Romans took Jerusalem. *That* his father had often told him. Who and what was this hawk-nosed stranger, who knew the signs of the inner temples and whose eyes had all the visions of a thousand years and more within them? Thus puzzling David took a final

look at his horse lines, spoke to his camp sentry, and laid himself down to sleep and dream of all that had befallen that day. And ever through his dreams rode the figure of Daoud Shah dressed as a prince and a ruler in Israel, devouring children spitted on skewers, and before him marched the chessmen calling, "Pharoah is dead ! Pharoah is dead !"

CHAPTER III

THE NORTH ROAD

THE next morning in accordance with the suggestions received from the Begum, David paraded his little troop as if it was to march off with Her Highness's *campo*. And a very wonderful thing to the military eye that *campo* was. To David, with his knowledge of the native states and their armies, the sight was not new, though it contrasted strongly with what he also knew of the orderly departure of the Honourable Company's troops from one of their camping grounds. Long before daylight, the camp was given up to turmoil and hubbub. The groaning and bubbling of angry camels, the screams of fighting stallions, and the chattering of camp followers mingled with the hammering to loosen tent-pegs, and the jingle of harness and saddle gear. The uneaten remnant of fodder and bedding had been thrown on the camp-fires which blazed to warm the chilly orientals who crouched round them, and to flicker on the spear-points and harnessments. In the gloom of the smoke on the outskirts of the glare, the huge forms of the elephants weaved uneasily from forefoot to forefoot, as the mahouts buckled on the heavy gun-harness and the riding howdahs. It was a weird and ghostly scene of strange sights and noises, till as the sun rose through the smoke and the trampled dust, something emerged from the

chaldron. Drums beat and trumpets blared, and a battalion of Her Highness's musketeers endeavoured to lead the procession, their muskets in green cloth bags, sloped over their shoulders. This corps actually moved in fours, "*Rompant par sections, droit en tête*," as the old Lille drill book had it from which the Chevalier, their last instructor, had drilled them. The said drill book annotated in Persian lay wrapped in the *Kom-madan's* breast pocket, for his writer to read for him if any one wished to argue a point of drill, or did he wish to embark on so important a manœuvre as ordering that the section "*Ligne mi kunand*."*

The ordered tramp of the drilled musketeers was mingled with the rattle and cries of a group of gossiping matchlockmen who hurried along on their outer flank, and then a string of camels went away, followed by the elephants and two galloper guns horsed after the manner of the English, save that the traces were old frayed rope. *That*, as David reflected, would *not* be seen in John Company's artillery! He and his own troop carefully accoutred, had mounted and formed up in line to watch the *campo*. At his side sat Ganesha Singh, criticizing with humorous invective the incongruity of the equipages. Gul Jan, the Company's veteran artilleryman, sat behind and echoed them even more forcibly.

"Tut! tut!" said Ganesha Singh. "Did ever you see such a horse as yon *ressaldar* is riding? Black with pink spots, I do declare, your honour! and he holding on with both hands."

"That's the *Bakshi*, Ganesha Singh, who came in yesterday with the pay. See! the pink spots are handmarks made with pink paint; see the finger-tips, that is to keep devils away at night. Look at his

* French-Persian = "were forming line."

embroidered velvet saddle, the old rogue! Here comes the Begum *Sahiba*. We will salute her."

David called his troop to attention, the lances being brought to the carry with a rattle as Her Highness's lacquered carriage drawn by trotting bullocks jingled past. The snap of the lances in the wrist throngs drew attention. A hand half drew the silk curtains and beckoned to the young soldier. David moved to her side at a gallop, pulled his handsome Arab up on his haunches and saluted. The Begum *Sahiba's* eyes from behind the curtains twinkled approval.

"I like to see your men and their orderly British ways. I shall be glad indeed some day to have you with me, to teach my worthless ones law and order. Did you see the Chevalier's regiment of musketeers?"

"I did, your Highness."

"What did you think of them?"

"It was so dark that I could not see clearly, but they marched well. I saw the guns also. Without doubt a fine army."

"Well, well! We shall see. Now, farewell, and wait till we are well past, then wheel away north in the dust and take my message to the Governor of Kashmir. Peace be with you."

"And with you too, gracious lady," responded David, and the curtains dropped and the march of the *campo* continued.

Behind Her Highness rode a dozen troopers of the retinue and some of her officers of state, and then another troop of matchlockmen. On either side of the line of march began to stream the *impedimenta*, more camels, pack bullocks, and donkeys, women and children and camp followers, Delilah in her litter, and the like. After a short gap followed a body of disciplined horse, and at their head rode the sardonic figure of Daoud Shah, the Commander-in-Chief of the

distinguished army. To him also David Fraser the politic accorded a military salute, the lances once more springing to the carry with a snap of the thong. Whether or no the Afghan detected the snap of derision that underlay the act of homage, or whether he was annoyed at the presence of so alert a body, it is certain that a very vicious gleam of the keen eyes accompanied his answering *salaam*, and his bearing seemed to resent the jaunty cock of the dragoon helmet which David was still wearing—as perhaps the wearer meant he should.

“That man,” remarked Ganesha Singh, “is the very worst kind of devil, and has the very greatest enmity for you, *Sahib*.”

“What makes you think that, old soldier?”

“I don’t think, *Sahib*, I know. I am certain. Does any man love the stranger who maketh him look a fool? Did ever a man look such a fool as he? You either upset some design of his, or you kept his soldiers in order when he himself could not. Is he likely to love you, *Sahib*? Will he stand with the Begum *Sahiba* as he stood before, think you? Never, till the dust return whence it came! The dogs bark, but the caravan passes. The Afghan smiles with his lips and wishes you peace, and all the while he says, ‘God smite your soul to the nethermost hell!’”

David was amused. “Well, do you know, old soldier, I have been thinking very much the same thing as you have. I am a foolish lad, I know; but, perhaps, not so foolish as to think I have made a friend of Daoud Shah.”

“Without doubt the Presence is full of wisdom,” replied the old man, with no hint of irony. “But this particular wisdom must always be uppermost in the mind. That man will go out of his way to work evil. Besides, he is well known to be possessed. I met in

the camp a man of my own cast whom I had known before. He says that this devil is in league with all the evil spirits and knows everything both of good and evil, and can call up the spirits of folk long dead and gone. The men will run past his tent at night, and will never take him a message in the dark."

"Ganesha Singh, you are a great baby to listen to such fairy tales."

"Your honour is my father and my mother. I do but tell what others tell to me. But I am old and I have been young, but never did I see a man with a *shaitan* * showing so clearly in his face."

"Well, to blazes with him, as Danny Irvine would have said. You don't remember him, do you, Ganesha Singh? He was my father's orderly, and—well, never mind! We'll be off on the north road now. Here is the last of the Begum's *fauj*, and the sun is getting up in the heavens."

So, to the English order of "threes right," Fraser moved away his troop to the north, across the great cloud of red dust that the troops and their baggage had raised, and which mingled with the smoke of the camp fires heavy in the morning dew. The two made such a canopy, that no one would see the direction of Fraser's troop, nor that they had not marched in the track of Her Highness's force. It was that lady's own suggestion, so that Daoud Shah should not be let into the secrets of the young Englishman's move, and her simple suggestion was like to be effective. Daoud Shah had evidently thought that he had his orders from the Begum, and would fall in in the column of march.

Once clear on the north road, exhilaration rose in the lad. 'Tis good to be two-and-twenty with a fine troop of light dragoons at your back a-setting out to seek

* Devil.

your fortune, on a cool, brisk morning in an Indian spring. Eh, sirs! To hack your way to power with your own sword arm and your own resources behind you, what finer champagne for the imagination. Half the troopers were lads, too, agog to have their day, full of confidence in the lad who sat at their head, with old Ganesha Singh at the helm for wisdom in the evil ways of an Eastern world.

A few miles after starting the road broke out from scattered fields and patches of scrub jungle to a fine flat of plain covered in short dry grass and stone. The opportunity was too good to be lost.

"Tell those two *ekkas* to come along quietly, Ganesha Singh, with Gul Jan, and I will rattle some of these lads across the plain.

"Head! To the right, wheel! Threes left! Look to your centre! Can—ter!"

And away went the happy troop over the plain, till the canter stretched to a gallop and the gallop to a wild screaming charge such as David had seen the Bengal Irregulars make in the old cantonment days. Then the troop rallied round the halted figure of their leader, and the young Afghans of the party yelped delight.

"Steady now, steady men! We will drill till Gul Jan comes up with the *ekkas*."

And then and there the astonished wayfarer might have seen a troop of cavalry drilling after the manner of the English. And so drilling and training his men and conditioning his horses David Fraser marched his small party ever north, halting a day or two when the camping ground was quiet and agreeable, beating for wild boar when opportunity offered and meeting with no adventure or interference for several days. Once by a small group of shrines they found a fanatic woman with a naked sword, standing athwart an old causeway

that dated from the days of good Emperor Akhbar, who built roads and bridges. The stream it spanned was deep, and the bridge alone offered passage, while at the end the infuriated feminine flourished the sword wildly. A trooper who advanced on her to bid her make way, came back with his tail between his manly legs, and a bleeding snick on his horse's nose. The men openly said, "Kill her, and be done with it. We can't wait here all day for that old piece of rag and bone." But David had some of the English ruth. "Nay, we will not slay the old body. Here, Ganesha Singh, cannot you cope with the lady?"

Ganesha Singh grinned behind his grizzled, twisted beard. And he rode forward half over the causeway, but the lady only waved her sword more furiously. "Very well," said the old Rajpoot. "Now, listen to me. I know you well. Your mother was the very worst sort of woman, and had immoral relations with every one, even sweepers. You have been the mistress of the Evil One himself. You have lent yourself——"

But the woman was gone, and Ganesha Singh, with a perfectly solemn face took his stand to cover the further end of the now free causeway while the troop, chuckling with laughter, filed over.

On the twelfth day the party arrived close to the ancient town of Sirhind, which means the head of all India, and here Ganesha Singh met a relative in charge of some horsemen of the local chief who sent an invitation for them to halt in a garden of his, outside the city. This David was glad enough to do, as he had now heard that the snow was late on the passes, and that he could not get to Kashmir yet awhile save by the long route away in the north. For ten days they rested and fed their horses on the young green wheat till their coats shone again. The local chief, who was a Sikh, received the visitor courteously, and sent him

presents of fruit, and sweetmeats for his men, and David found that state better controlled than any he had previously had doings with. One day, while halting, he was surprised to see a British force pass through, and to learn it was part of General Lake's army chasing back some Sikh horse to their own territory north of the River Sutlej. A battery of native horse artillery was with the column, and David felt that sick longing for a happy life now past that most men have known at one time or another. The well-fitted harness, the well-kept horses, the trim, disciplined gunners and the hard-bit British officers brought back so forcibly his childhood, the swinging gun-buckets below the gun axles so like those of his father's battery moving out of cantonments. Often had he watched those same gun-buckets swing when he had peeped through the bars of his father's compound gate. Now and again he had been allowed to come out and be taken up on a limber, to sit on a gunner's knee, and, joy of joys, to hold on to guard straps and feel the jolting limbers as the teams broke into a trot. Why, oh why, had he let that life slip from him? And then came the memory of those young officers who had spoken of him contemptuously as a half-breed. The blood rushed to his temples at the mere memory of it. Little enough of a half-breed did he look, if half-breed be synonymous with contempt and an inferior being, as he stood under the garden trees to watch them march by. Tall and straight and clean cut, with clean high-land ancestry behind him on both sides.

However, with the rush of blood to his temples he remembered that he was off to seek his fortune and come back as good a man as any of them. Then he felt that he would have liked to have shown his own troop, clean and fit after their rest, to the English officers, but the men were all dispersed except the

camp guard. Then again for the moment he was chagrined that he had not his dragoon helmet on and his yellow kurta and sword, so that he might ride out and salute them as a soldier. Then he laughed at himself for a vain fool, and the bitterness passed away. He would keep away till he had a name and fame of his own and then go among them, and so strolled off to see his own troop horses, like the brave sturdy heart he was.

And it was in some such manner that the journey north continued, without misadventure save at the boat bridge over the Ravi by Trimmoo Ghat. A party of Afghans wanted to pick a quarrel and loot his baggage *ekkas*, but this David carried off with a high hand, leaving two Afghans dead in the river for their pains, with no worse harm to his own lot than a dead horse and a sword cut in old Ganesha Singh's forearm, happily not his bridle arm. So on they went past the maiden city of Sialkot, only staying to cash the Begum's bill, and over the Jammu Tawi, to camp under the walls of Jammu city itself, where a Dogra boy of the troop had an uncle who greeted them well. At Jammu it became necessary to sell the *ekkas* and buy pack-ponies for the mountain road. Thence on again the road would lie till they came to the great river Chenab rushing out of its mountain gorges by the ancient city of Akhnur, and here they were getting in to the outer hills that lead up to that great branch of the Himalaya that men call the Pir Panjal, behind which lies the Happy Valley of Kashmir.

CHAPTER IV

THE NIGHT SKIRMISH

It was again in the early morning that David and his troopers started from their camp under the high loop-holed walls of Jammu city and struck off on the Akhnur road and the Chenab ferry towards the principality of Poonch. The crossing of the Chenab involved some considerable delay, for the horses and mules had to be coaxed up shaky planks over the high sides of the ferry boat, and then swept over in the swift current to the landing *ghat* below the black walls of Akhnur fort. Here the governor and commander of the Dogra garrison had to be appeased, the Jammu passport duly *viséd* and suitable compliments exchanged. Finally, a ragamuffin guard presented arms in the French style, and the party clattered out along the cobbled highways of the town towards the sandstone ridges and stunted pines of the outer hills.

Three days of unadventurous travel brought them to the old Imperial road at Rampur Rajaori, which runs from Delhi *via* Lahore and Gujerat over the great snowy Pir Panjal mountains to the Valley of Kashmir. By this road, summer after summer, year in year out, the great Mogul emperors had moved with their women, their elephants, their horse, their foot, and their artillery, to escape in Kashmir from the devastating heat of the plains of Hindostan. The great road had

crumbled to decay as the Mogul Empire shrivelled, for there were none to exercise authority to impress the labour that could keep it in repair. For many a stage over the mountains ran the Imperial road, cobbled and graded, past oak and pine to juniper, the silver birch, the snow and the glacier. At every stage a *serai* or resthouse, stood crumbling. At any beautiful spot the *serai* had expanded to a garden with fountains and rippling waterfalls, with Moorish summer houses, now the sport of the casual traveller. Grey stone towers, deserted except by some occasional highland cateran, stood commanding the defiles so that none should harry the imperial travellers, hurrying from the beautiful canals and fountains of the Shalimar Gardens in Lahore, to the still more beautiful Shalimar under the mountains on the shores of a Kashmir lake.

To the Mogul *serai* at Rampur Rajaori headed the small cavalcade, to bivouac in the overgrown orange groves that surrounded the fountains of the *serai*, and to stall their horses where the moving court of emperors had been pitched. Below the garden which overhung the river Tawi stood the town of Rajaori, bright with Hindu temple spires and full of traders sending and receiving the mule caravans from Kashmir. In due course the headman of the town had arrived, to see who the strangers were, it being his duty to protect the interests of the town. True, it was hardly meet that he should have gone himself, a bailiff would have done as well, but parties of horse are apt to be high-handed, and it would be well to see what they wanted, lest they started frolicking in the bazaars, or bullying the town guard. Should the arrivals appear insignificant they could be bounced, and if powerful they could be grovelled to. Such is the morality of the East or perhaps of the world. To enable him to grovel suitably if need be, the headman of Rajaori

would carry in his pocket two golden *ashrafi*, or Mogul guineas, to be tendered by way of tribute should the arrival seem sufficiently powerful to warrant such an attention. The tendering of this tribute or *nazar*, to give it its Persian name, was merely an act of courtesy or fealty, and the recipient in the custom of the day would touch and remit the tendered tribute. Now and again, some grasping overlord might unexpectedly pocket the coins and leave the donor gasping in surprise and dismay, but that would be unusual.

So the headman mounted his pony and rode to the *serai*, with two running footmen carrying guns in front, and a bailiff with inkpot behind, and two gold coins in case of need in his pocket. As he approached the *serai* the small number of horses tethered down showed that the arrival was not of much importance, but the sight of David Fraser's tall figure and commanding air sent his hand instinctively to his pocket. The gold coins automatically appeared and were duly touched and remitted, and the headman conducted to a seat. After the usual compliments David imparted such account of his own object and destination as he deemed sufficient, and then endeavoured to elicit such local news as might guide him.

The village headman who, as a guardian of peaceful traders, had little but guile to trust to against the "better plan" of his masterful neighbours, answered with equal circumspection. The Rajpoot Lord of Poonch gave Rajaori such protection as he could, for a suitable consideration, but this practically only held good against the local lairds who owned towers and fortified strongholds in the neighbourhood. When a body of Afghan horse, or other freelances, came along the local overlords were apt to be engaged elsewhere, besides, Poonch lay over the Rattan Pir, twenty miles away. So as David Fraser only desired to be let alone

and get the supplies he wanted, and as the baillie but wished for peace, they at last got on to talking terms.

Said Baillie Anand Ram, headman of Rampur Rajaori—

“Your honour is doubtless going over the Pir to Kashmir by the ‘snowy road’?”

To which David replied, “Well, I am not sure, I had thought of going to Poonch, they tell me that the Pir is blocked.”

“No,” said the baillie, “the road is open. A party of Afghans is at Thanna Mandi, and they are said to have crossed yesterday.”

“Ah,” said David, “you will no doubt see them here.”

“God forbid! What should I do with them? Besides, this is a Sikh country, and unless they be strong there are many here who wish them ill. The Rajah of Sialsi has a death feud with every Afghan, ever since the commandant of Banihal burnt his brother alive in his tower.”

This matter of the arrival of the Afghans from Kashmir was the only item of news of any value that Anand Ram could purvey, and so, after gracious adieus, and pronouncing himself true friend, with promise of all supplies that Fraser could require, he ambled off as oilily as he came.

That evening David fished with such success in the Tawi below, that he stayed late to fish next morning, and it was high noon before he started on the next stage to Thanna Mandi. It was dusk when he reached that village, and camped down among the patches of purple iris, on the hither side, and sent a trooper to inquire if the Afghan party was still there. Hardly had the man returned with the news that they were in the traveller’s *serai* a couple of hundred yards off when a volley of musketry sounded, followed by shouts

and cries. David's men at once saddled their horses and seized their arms. The business of the freelance is to keep out of other folk's quarrels, unless expressly hired to engage in them, and it was no man's affair in David's party, as to who did, or did not, cut each other's throats at the other side of the hamlet. They did therefore the only wise thing. They stood by to see what might befall. However, before many minutes had elapsed women's cries were added to the hubbub, and David, who had the European rather than the Oriental view of women, bidding Nihal Singh hold the camp and the horses with eight men, hurried out into the darkness with the remainder. The shots and cries came from the old *serai*, and now and again a musket flashed in the darkness from the shadow of the ruined gateway. Someone was evidently holding the place and giving as good as he got. As David and his men passed the last hut in the hamlet, they saw a dozen or so of dark shadows rush at the *serai* wall, and heard more shouts on the opposite side. Reflecting that the folk in the rest house were in some sort his kinsmen, and that as he was going to Kashmir he might well ease the way by making friends there, he rushed with a cheer on to the men attacking the *serai*. The unexpected attack from behind settled the business, the attackers turned and fled, with a volley in their backs from the wall, and a few sword cuts from David and his leading men. One of the strangers turned and let off a blunderbuss into Ganesha Singh's face, knocking off his turban and dusting his left ear, and the scrimmage was over.

Collecting his men, David approached the *serai* cautiously.

"Who are you; strangers of the night?" called a voice from the gateway in Persian.

"A friend," replied David, in the same language. "A

party of travellers making for Kashmir with messages for the governor, who, hearing of the attack on you, have come to your aid."

"*Khush amede*" (welcome), replied the voice. "It is good. We have been attacked by that son of a burnt father, the Rajah of Sialsi—God smite his soul to the nethermost hell!"

"I am coming forward alone with one attendant," called out David, stepping forward.

At the gate a form stepped out and took David's hand in both his, after the manner of the Afghans, and half a dozen men crowded round him, with expressions of welcome and gratitude. The spokesman, evidently one in authority, said again, "Welcome indeed, young sir. If you are going to Kashmir you have done well, for you have helped no less a person than His Excellency Salabat Khan, the Subahdar of Kashmir, the *Wazir-Wizarat* of the Emperor of Kabul. We came over yesterday for certain business, and were attacked by these swine."

"Oho Yar Khan, oho!" called a faint voice from within the yard. "Is that the strange chief that has aided us? Bid him bring the light of his countenance here."

Yar Khan, apologizing to David, stepped back into the darkness, and a whispered conversation ensued. Yar Khan returned.

"Sir," said he, "His Excellency has been severely wounded by those men without faith, and would speak with you, first asking your name and business."

"My name is Daoud Ferassa; but who I am and what my business is I will only tell His Excellency in private, but this you may say, that I have with me a troop of cavalry, and have come intending to seek service under him."

By this time some of the Afghans had set light to a

fire of grass and brushwood, and the flickering flames lit up the interior of the *serai*. Glancing round, David saw a dozen or so horses, tethered, one lying dead, while three bodies were being laid side by side, and two wounded men were being attended to. The women's cries were accounted for too, for in the corner by an orange grove was a small crimson silk *raoti* (tent), and, standing beside it, two women clasping each other's arms, and muffled in veils. Close to the fire lay, supported by two attendants, the wounded figure of His Excellency the *Wazir-Wazarat*, a handsome fair-visaged Afghan noble, with reddish cheeks and a close-trimmed dark beard, not at all unlike David himself. As David stepped forward into the light and salaamed, the likeness at once struck the bystanders, and Yar Khan exclaimed aloud at it. Yar Khan was *wazir* and master of the horse to the governor, and commander of the escort, a grizzled old Duranni soldier with war and command written clear on his visage. As David drew near to the fire, the two women advanced and stood in the shadow of a tree behind the governor.

"Sir," said the latter. "We are very greatly beholden to you for your timely arrival and bold advance. As you saw, we were treacherously attacked by those villains of Rajpoots, and were in some danger, several men have been killed and these ladies were much frightened. They are my sister and her maids, and she has just come from my uncle's town at Sohan, and we cross the Pir to-morrow."

Here Yar Khan, who had been collecting reports, said—"Sher Baz Orakzai, and Kaim Khan Alisherzai, and also Abdul Rafik Duranni are dead, and those two young Afridis are wounded, one cannot stand. Here is the *hakim* to examine your Excellency's wound.

"Tush, Yar Khan! it is nothing. Let every one withdraw twenty yards so that I can speak with this

nobleman alone. Yar Khan, you may remain—oh yes, and my sister, if this illustrious stranger does not mind women. She is a spoilt Afghan lass, who rides a horse and does what she pleases and is afraid of no man; and not like your tied-up women of India.”

So David represented himself as a freelance of Rohilla birth, and Duranni tribe, concealing, however, his mother's actual clan, and explained how he had a letter from the Begum Somru for Salabat Khan; and how he wanted service.

“Right willingly will I give you service, sir,” said Salabat Khan. “And proud to have you with me. We will all march over the Pir to-morrow, for I have pressing business, and must be back in my capital. In the meantime I must get my wound seen to, and we had better meet again at an hour after dawn. But let me once again thank you, on my own and my sisters' behalf.”

And here one of the women drew herself up and bowed, and a gentle rhythm of bangles disturbed the silence, and a shapely hand emerged to draw the veil, so that for a minute a pair of eyes flashed at him from under the muslin. Then, escorted by Yar Khan and some of the Afghans, who were fraternizing with the Mussalmans of his own party, David Fraser marched back to his bivouac, with a feeling that all was well in the best of possible worlds.

Yar Khan treated him with some show of confidence, and spoke of the value that would accrue at the present juncture in Kashmir, from the services of so well equipped a troop of horse, and how well worth David's while it would be to serve Salabat Khan. That noble, he explained, was powerful and popular, but there were plenty of enemies of the state, and of the ruler, and plenty of service and reward for good soldiers.

"We," he continued, speaking of the ruling race, "hold the Shergarhi and the fort of Hari Parbat, and indeed, the whole of Kashmir, while in the Lolab valley we have a large Afghan colony; but there are many enemies. The Hindu chiefs here in this Dun hate us, and attack us, as you see, when we are weak. The Chinese in the mountains north, give us all the trouble they can. So there is plenty of work for the soldier with the ready hand that you have shown. Join us, young sir, and find a glorious and a profitable service."

From all of which David gathered or thought he gathered two things—first that Yar Khan had taken a liking to him, and second that Salabat Khan was none too secure in his viceroyalty.

After parting with Yar Khan at the gate of the *serai*, David called away his followers, who were gossiping with the Afghan guard, and returned to his bivouac to picket his horses and seek well-earned sleep. Not so the troopers, who, after their wont, piled brushwood on the camp fires and sat to discuss the day's events when sleep would have served them better. It was the first skirmish they had had since the *rissalah* had been seeking its own fortunes. The best of soldiers will discuss their leaders even though never demurring at any commands. As a man is no hero to his valet, so a leader is open to his soldier's criticisms. Freelances are less trammelled than are regular soldiers, and their camp talk ranges free.

"So, Ganesha Singh *jee*, we are to take service with this Afghan?" queried one of the Marathas. Ganesha Singh had pulled his sword from his waist belt and his orderly was just offering him a pull from a *huga* bowl, with a bit of cloth at the end. That long-awaited-for whiff was soothing. Ganesha Singh let the accent on the word Afghan pass. There were Afghan troopers

in the party, and if they roused it would be time to comment.

"The *Sahib* says we are to go join this noble's troops in Kashmir. There will be fighting always on the borders and good pay and promotion."

"Fortunate enough for them that we broke in just now. Some of those troopers were about to make a bolt."

Gul Jan had come up from easing his master of his accoutrements, and had caught the last words.

"Young man, you are talking as usual as the young crows talk. The Durannis of that escort were little likely to give way to Hindus, and would have died to a man in the *serai*."

Ganesha Singh broke in. "Never mind the lad, old man. Sit down and take a pull at the *huga*. It is a good beginning to service that we should have helped our new masters. Ferassa *Sahib* is a fine leader, as you and I know, and it is good that those who have lately joined us should know it. Are the horses all tethered, Nihal Singh?"

"All except that entire second charger of the *Sahib's*. Not the Arab, but that country bred. That horse will always be a trouble, and will surely spoil some night enterprise. Hark to him squealing now."

"Entires are like men, the low grade ones are no use to a soul. Tell the line sentry to hit him over the head. Has the *Sahib* gone to sleep, Gul Jan?"

"He has, *Ressaldar Sahib*."

"Good! Then we can talk on here, but I shall kick the fire out in quarter of an hour. Has any one been in these hills before?"

"I live twenty or thirty miles south of this," said Nihal Singh.

"And I have been into Kashmir in the late governor's time, before Salabat Khan came from Kabul," said Gul Jan.

"And I also," said a young Mogul.

"Tell us what it is like, Mogul *Jee*."

"Fine place in the summer. Food very cheap, lots of fruit. The women are very good looking, and the Kashmiri women free-spoken; but if you look at a pundit woman there is the mischief to pay!"

The young man spoke feelingly, and there was a laugh.

"You Muhammadans are always interfering with other folk's women!"

Nihal Singh winked across to another Rajpoot, and the Hindus chuckled.

The Mogul lad saw nothing to be ashamed of in the assertion; every one knew that *Zār Zār Zāmeen*—gold, women, land—were at the bottom of all the trouble, and most of the interest in the world, at any rate the interests of a freelance trooper.

"Anyway there will be lots of strong spirits brewed in the valley from the apples, that will just suit you wine-bibbing Hindus."

A chorus of ironical spirits laughed in his face, every one was too tired to quarrel, and wine was an excellent thing in due season. If Islam chose to eschew it, why not! The line sentry broke in.

"Two of the horses are off their feed, *Jenab*."

The good discipline of the English habit had bitten into this small troop. Ganesha Singh got up and kicked the fire out.

"To sleep, every man, lest I clout him, while I go see the sick horses."

The old soldier and the sentry went down the lines, and found two over-tired horses playing with their feed-bags.

"They are only tired. Take the bags away for an hour and give them their grass. Stay, I have some vinegar. Rub their nostrils with that before you give them grass. They'll take their feeds later. Call me if they don't."

CHAPTER V

OVER THE PIR WITH MIRIAM

DAVID was astir early, bustling his troopers to clean their horses and gear and make a good turnout before the Afghans. By eight in the morning the shadows in the *galli* were shortening, and the sun's rays were climbing over the snowy peaks of the Pir Panjal as with an ordered clatter, David's compact troop wheeled into line outside the Afghan camp. Here, though the chief's retinue hung around dismounted with their horses ready and saddled, the chief's tent still stood in the *serai* garden. Under the trees the ladies' cavalcade seemed ready, but no one was mounted. Something appeared wrong, and what that something was was soon evident.

Salabat Khan's wound was much more serious than had been imagined in the wipe up after the fray. He had passed a bad night and was quite unfit to breast the passes of the Pir Panjal. As David rode up to make his *salaam* Salabat Khan and Yar Khan were in close conference within the tent. He was invited to dismount and did so, and entered the tent, to find the wounded chief a far better-looking man than he had imagined in the darkness and torchlight of the night before. A well-born Afghan, a cadet of a Duranni clan of the tribe of the Ben-i-Israel is or should be a fine figure of a man. The Afghans proper are the Durannis, the

race of the Pearl, who trace their descent from one Kish or Kais eighteenth in descent from Saul. Whether they be of the Children of Israel, which is how they style themselves, or whether as some think they be of Judah; and from which of the captivities they date, no man can tell. Certain it is that there were traces of Dan and half of Manasseh to be found within comparatively recent times in Central Asia. The tomb of the patriarch Lamech is claimed as one of the Afghan shrines. David or Daoud, Jacob Abraham, Isaac, Joseph and Jesus are among the every-day names of the Afghans. However, whether or no the Afghan be of the missing tribes and descendants of Royal Solomon, certain it is that they are of a high-browed aquiline feature, Jewish at times to a degree. The long, oiled locks are parted in the centre and combed down over the ears; and any dozen scoundrels from a border village might sit as models for a picture of the last supper. The high-born Afghan noble especially shows the Jewish feature, hard and clear cut like the patriarchs of old. Hard, from a life in a hard, fierce country, where the hand alone keeps the head, hard in its climate and hard in its people. Fair of skin is the Afghan compared with the people of Hindostan and all are by no means dark-haired. As David the King had fair red hair, so you may see the Afghan of the Ben-i-Israel, fair of beard and hair, with ruddy cheeks, born of a life in an upland country. In the East, the higher you climb the fairer, the lower you go the darker.

There was nothing therefore to wonder at in Salabat Khan's well-bred features. Lofty of forehead; with knit eyebrows and aquiline nose that promised to age to a hawk's beak, blue eyes and a close-trimmed reddish beard, he might well be of the house of Saul or David. In fact, he had a considerable likeness to David Fraser, save that he might be ten or fifteen years older. A

man to rule, no doubt, heavy of hand if need be, ready of arm, and perhaps a soft heart on occasion. A fascinating face, too, and so thought the young Anglo-Indian, looking straight into the Afghan's eyes, while exchanging the ever-profuse greetings of the East.

"Ferassa *Sahib*," said the chief, "are you willing to enter my service?"

"That is my desire, sir," returned David. "I have with me too, as I told you last night, a letter for your Excellency from Her Highness the Begum Somru."

"It is well. . . . You are highly spoken of herein. Are you ready to swear fealty to me on the Koran?"

"I am ready to swear fealty to you, sir."

"Yar Khan," said the chief, "let a Koran be brought."

Here David felt a little disconcerted. To swear allegiance he was ready, but not to swear by the Crescent, he who had been brought up by the Cross. Should he reveal his nationality? So far he had passed muster, not only in his language, but evidently in his bearing and ways, as an Asiatic. He quickly came to a decision. His men knew, and would be sure to divulge it as a matter of course, even if he could hope to disguise it himself. He knew well enough that it is one thing to speak an alien language fluently, but quite another matter to act the right part by instinct. It is one thing to be grammatical, and idiomatic, another to sit as an Oriental sits, to eat as he eats, to scratch as he scratches and to yawn as he yawns. The which is often forgotten by travellers to their undoing. His decision came at once.

"May I speak to your Excellency alone?"

And Salabat Khan waved away Yar Khan and the attendants.

"I will swear to serve you and yours, Salabat Khan *Sahib*, not by the Koran and the Prophet, but by the *Häzärät Iswi*, for I am a Frank and a Christian."

Then Salabat Khan, after eyeing him keenly, said, "Ferassa *Sahib*, of the Franks I myself know but little enough, but all men speak of their courage and truth. I will accept your oath by the *Häzärät Iswi*, on whom be peace! and will tell you now what I require of you. Then, when time is of lesser import, you shall tell me who and what you are and why you left the service of Company *Sahib Bahadur*."

Now *Häzärät Iswi* (the Prophet Jesus) is deeply revered in Islam, and the educated Muhammedan is ready enough to recognize the solemnity of such an oath. The Christian is not an infidel in the eyes of educated Islam, and Christians are "people of the book" to be respected as such. That Salabat Khan should unhesitatingly accept the sanctity of the invocation merely proved him to David to be a man of understanding and culture, to whom he was more than ever prepared to trust his fortune. Then the Afghan began again.

"Now, Ferassa *Sahib*, you are my servant, listen; therefore, to my trouble, but first we will call Yar Khan"—which done, he continued—"Yar Khan, I am now telling Daoud Ferassa here who has accepted my service, of the state of affairs. My wound of last night is more severe than I thought. I cannot ride a horse, and my *hakim** forbids even that I ride in a litter for my head swims and my eyes burn. Now, it is most important that my *Wazir*, Yar Khan, should be back in my palace of the Shergarhi in Srinagar without delay with a following that he can trust. But I must have an escort with me. I shall go to shelter with

* Doctor.

Murad Ali, the Chib chief beyond Poonch, whose sister my brother has married. Yar Khan will start now with you and your troop and half my own escort, and my sister and her girls must go with you. I trust her to your care, Ferassa *Sahib*, and I know how the Franks can keep their faith with women. On reaching the Shergarhi, at Srinagar, you will at once occupy the fort, and Yar Khan will fully explain to you all that is necessary. I see you are ready and so is my sister Miriam and Yar Khan's men. Start at once, you will find the pass easier before the snow gets soft in the sunlight. Fare thee well, I rely on your faith and your oath on the *Házārāt Iswi*."

Without more ado, David left the tent, and joined his men, and a few minutes later Yar Khan came out, called to all his party to mount, and came over to where the freelance stood.

"Mount your men, please, *Sahib*," said the Afghan, "and we will get along. My men will lead to commence with. See, the princess is mounted. I will start off the *kafila*."

By the time David had ordered his men to mount, the whole party were on the move, Miriam and her two women riding between the Afghan troopers and David's party. In this order they rode away up the winding, broken road over the Rattan Pir, where the old Moghul causeway was crumbling to decay, and only served to turn the rainwater to eat down into the present path. Over the Pir and down again till about nine of the clock they came to the ford on the Poonch river that must be crossed ere the ascent of the Pir Panjal could be commenced.

At the ford the party which had been strung out on the narrow path came together again, and David was able to take some stock of the troopers of Yar Khan's party. Well mounted on Kabuli and Yarkandi ponies,

they were evidently very similar men to the few Afghans among his own troop, possibly clansmen of Salabat Khan or Yar Khan, possibly mere mercenaries like himself. They certainly looked good hard-bitten soldiers such as his military eye appreciated. Of the women there was little to be seen. The two attendants rode heavily veiled, while even Miriam herself was well wrapped in a muslin hood and scarf, and it was little that David could see of her, or, for the matter of that, wanted to see. His thoughts were rarely concerned with the opposite sex. Not so, however, the lady herself. She was now very well aware of the part in last night's affray that the stranger and his men had taken, and had quite realized that without his timely assistance it might have gone hard with her brother and herself. She had no mind to be led away to a Rajpoot fort, and that no doubt would have been her fate if the attack of last night had prevailed. Also the feminine is much the same all the world over, and Afghan Miriam had a good eye for a pretty man and a soldier. All her life she had lived with soldiers and norsemen, and had been brought up in the atmosphere of war and strife, and came from a country where the hand must keep the head. Therefore men of action she understood. Also an Afghan maid is as other maids are, curious, always curious as to what may be her lot in life, and whether she marry a lord she likes, and whether he shall be a hero and a Rustum. Further, Persian love-songs there be that tell of the devotion of man to maid and the happiness that love may bring. Had not she heard the wandering minstrel sing of such themes away in the pomegranate groves of Kabul, and in Shalimar, in gay Kashmir? Old Amah, her nurse, had told her many a tale of Khans and princes of the Tartars riding away with their lady loves behind them on fast Persian horses, carried off from under their papa's

very noses, despite their plans to give them in marriage to stuffy old Usbeg nobles. Dear old squat-nose Mongol Amah, with almond eye-slits and a skin like a last year's pomegranate! What good stories she had of stranger princes who did mighty deeds. So, as the keen wind blew off the Pir Panjal, and whistled through the tops of the blue pine, Miriam's spirits had risen and she had caught her pony up by his thorn bit and made him prance down the slope to the Poonch till her two serving girls squealed with alarm lest their sheepish ponies should do the same. Miriam was a horse-woman and could ride at a tent-peg, if relations only were looking on, like any girl of a Ghilzai clan.

The excitement of last night's fray, too, stirred her good red blood, and all seemed well in the sunlit forest, "Sing Ho! Sing Heigh! for Arcady," and her prancing steed danced into the shiny swirling ford of the Poonch. But mountain fords are chancy things, and a leaping *Mahseer** made Bijli, her horse, start and turn down-stream. Two steps, and the ford was lost, and the horse floundering in and out of deep holes and stumbling breast-high over sunken rocks. Miriam soon found she was like to get a wet skin, if nothing worse, and called out to the troopers who had crossed ahead. But the roar of the rapids drowned her voice, when down the path to the river came David and his party. They saw at once that the force of the stream was the trouble, and with a shout a dozen of his men jumped from their horses and immediately rushed into the stream forming a line shoulder to shoulder, arms intertwined, above the rapids in which she was floundering. Almost at once the stream rose a foot high above the waists of the wall of men and sank a foot below them, so that the swirls in the pools lost its force, and

* A large kind of fish.

Bijli was able to steady himself. As he did so David arrived to seize his bridle and pilot the girl to the safe path and the bank again.

The excitement of the situation had banished reserve and disarranged Miriam's veil, so that David found a bright-eyed maid with sparkling eyes and braided hair ornamented with turquoise torques, bent rather on handling a frightened horse than on preserving the silent dignity of a lady of high degree and Oriental seclusion. Her greeting to David in recognition of his assistance was entirely natural and enthusiastic, so that when that young officer had set the ladies on their right path and rejoined his men, he found himself for the first time in his life dwelling on the memory of what feminine eyes could look like if only you knew how to look at them. During his life, women had not entered into his conception of the world. His mother he remembered well as a being apart, and there was one English lady, who had made a friend of the Afghan dame, visiting at his father's house, but that marriage itself had cut Major Fraser off to a great extent from the social life of the English settlements. The band, the dances and the reception of the station assembly rooms, had not been for him, so that young David had grown up with none of the feminine society that young Englishmen would have been accustomed too. Since he had become a free-lance he had had no entanglements, nor had the dancing girl adventuresses that thronged the Eastern courts he had served at brought him at all within their sway. If therefore the eyes of Miriam had looked with favour on the handsome lad who had so successfully come to her assistance that morning, and that of her party generally the night before, they had looked on a promising material to experiment on.

Musing on the glimpse of the lady he had seen, and

speculating on her and her brother's position in Kashmir and what military prospects his new engagement offered him, he sat while his horse climbed for him.

So up and ever upwards towards the snowy pass the cavalcade slowly wound along the graded causeway, past the blue pine and silver fir, and ilex, to the birch and the juniper. Now and again the leading party would halt to let the string close up, and to ease the horses, and the headmen of any hamlets passed would hurry out to offer the customary tribute to travellers who were evidently of high degree. But it was full high noon before the camping-ground and old fort of Hyderabad *Serai* was reached, and here Yar Khan announced his intention of halting for an hour while the girths were loosed and the horses fed and the loads lifted from the sumpter mules. The Afghan is nothing if not a good horse-master, as David noticed with appreciation. A place for the Lady Miriam was found under a copse of silver birch and juniper, and some skins to lie on, unrolled from one of the pack loads. Then, having posted a couple of sentries, Yar Khan drew David to a rock overhanging the road by which they had come, and asked for details of what had happened at the ford. When he had heard the story, he remarked—

"It's no bad thing to have made a friend of the Lady Miriam. She has great influence with her brother, and says and does what she likes. Thank God, that is usually wise, or we might often be in trouble. She won't marry any of the nobles who have sought her, and Salabat Khan only laughs, and says she shall do as she likes. 'Tis not my idea of how to manage women. In my young day we married them to whom we liked, and listened not to their weepings and their tantrums."

And here this fierce old hidalgo twisted his moustache and pulled at his close cropped beard. Yar Khan's thick squat nose and almond eye showed that there must be Tartar blood in his veins for all his Afghan pedigree, and with a pock-marked skin, ruddy cheeks and grizzled beard he looked every inch the rough and tumble highland chief of few scruples and imperfect manners. His small turban was set jauntily on one side of his head, and this lent an air of ram-you, dam-you independence to his bearing which was singularly attractive. His square, muscular figure heightened this impression. A life of soldiering, of striving, and at last of actual king-making, had given him great confidence in his own power and judgment, and his outer man bore testimony thereto.

"However," he continued, "that is no affair of mine, I have other things to do than look after the ladies of the governor's family and household. It is quite enough for one poor Afghan to manage the affairs of a vice-regal court. Now, see here, young sir. His Excellency ordered me to tell you the whole situation, and trust you fully since he was convinced of your sincerity. I won't say that I am too, but according to orders I now tell you all about it. Salabat Khan has been governor in Kashmir for the last six years, on behalf of the Shah at Kabul, and we have held the province for the Duranni Empire against Rajput and Sikh, but especially against intrigue. We have held the valley against the first two as open enemies, for His Excellency fears no man, but we have also held it for his own hand against factions who would work him harm at court and supplant him as governor. There are many Afghan nobles settled on the land in Kashmir, especially in the Lolab valley, and there are several Toorki families who are bitterly hostile to His Excellency Salabat Khan. Altamish Khan is the principal

chief of the Toorks, and he has a large following. His land is in *jaghir*,* and so long as he does not commit himself we cannot interfere with him, but we know that he is at the bottom of half the trouble in Kashmir. He hates Salabat Khan too, with a bitter hatred, born of some business over a maid of Baltistan some ten years ago. Now it is because of some news we had of doings at Srinagar that Salabat Khan was anxious to push on over the Pir, and has sent me and the Lady Miriam on in his stead with your support. The Lady Miriam is much beloved of the people, and her presence is always a strength to us in time of trouble. I expect a runner to-night at our camp to say how things are in the capital."

After which outline of Kashmir politics, it was time for the *kafila* to be up and off again, the horses fresh after their rest and feed.

* Feudal tenure

CHAPTER VI

THE RIVAL PARTY AT SRINAGAR

FIFTY or sixty miles away from the top of the Pir Panjal, lies the capital of Srinagar, the Holy City, holy to the Hindu and holy in the Sanscrit language. The old Hindu kings had long been ousted by the all-conquering might of Islam, and the population of the valley save only the Brahmin Levite clans had long been converted forcibly to believe in God and His prophet. The beautiful old stone temples of the Hindus, which men said had been built by the semi-mythical Pandavs, had been destroyed. Destroyed, men said again, by piling burning brushwood against the walls and then dashing cold water on the heated carvings so that they cracked and flaked away from the wall, in which ruined and desolate state they remain to this day. The Holy City stands bereft of its holiness on both sides of the river Jhelum, on plinths stolen from the ancient temples. The river rises away at the top of the valley of Kashmir, clear and strong from a pool under a hill, round which is built a palace, and then wanders for sixty miles through that beautiful upland valley where only man is vile, as wandered and curled that wayward stream into which the goodly youth Meander turned, far away in fair Hellas many a century earlier. On the banks clustered the latticed houses and the carved verandahs of the city folk, and

the tall spires of the mosques of Islam. Among these same mosques there stood one in which men claim, lies Christ, who according to the legend of Kashmir, died not on the Cross, but survived to wander East and preach peace and goodwill, recognized by modern Islam as one of the prophets.

If you look on Srinagar from one of the northern spurs of the Pir Panjal, you will see the green valley and the meandering Jhelum curling in those figures of eight that first suggested the famous shawl pattern. And rising above the city of spires you will see the tall hill in the middle of the valley overhanging the city which folk call the Throne of Solomon, and close to it a lesser hill crowned by a fortress. Across, on the far side, the northern fringe of mountains, snow-clad and commanding, whence the roads lead to China and Thibet and the ever famous pilgrims' road. Then, as you descend from the spurs and ride on you will come to the walled palace and barrack of Srinagar known as the *Shergarhi*, or lion's dwelling, in which the Governor dwelt with all his machinery of government, save on such occasions when he chose to move himself to the greater fortress of Hari Parbat, on the lesser hill referred to, whence his iron guns frowned over the city below. It is always good when an Eastern potentate to have some frowning place of refuge against the days when the people fail to appreciate efforts and methods of governing, or when schism rends the land.

Round the outskirts of the city stand many garden residences of the nobles. Behind the Throne of Solomon, between it and the great mountains, lies that most wonderful land-locked lake known as the Dhall, and on its shores the beautiful gardens that the Mogul Emperors of Delhi had laid out for their own and their ladies' pleasure—the Shalimar, the Garden of Happiness, and the Garden of Soft Breezes. The very name

Shalimar is redolent of Eastern beauty and love and wine, "The fair pale hand I love beside the Shalimar." And behind the Shalimar lay the village of Pulhalan, and close by the village the suburban residence of Altamish Khan, the Toork. If any one had been in an observant mood in an afternoon in the middle of the Hindu month of *chet*, he would have seen that row-boats kept making for the Shalimar from various sides of the lake, and by the green highway from the Holy City, horse, foot, and sedan chairs. In fact, Altamish Khan was giving a garden party to those of his friends and supporters who might further his plans regarding the governorship.

The evening before, a messenger had arrived from a friend and watcher in the state of Poonch, and the news that he had brought was that His Excellency Salabat Khan had been killed in a skirmish with the Hill Rajpoots close to Thanamandi on the Punjab side of the Pir Panjal. Thereon Altamish Khan had decided on seizing the governorship forthwith, by a *coup de main*, cutting off in the process the heads of all the Afghan party, as distinguished from the Toork party, who might be likely to thwart or oppose him. The which is a first principle in Eastern politics. Now Altamish Khan, the Toork, was as dissolute and unprincipled as a man brought up in the decaying court of Delhi well could be, sparing, when opportunity offered, none who ever crossed his path to hindrance. He was, moreover, a born intriguer, and, like many of his kindred, often over-reached himself. His agents of intrigue were many, and none more influential and shrewder than the lady who, styling herself the Begum Allah Visayah, belonged to what has been called the oldest profession in the world. She dwelt, after the manner of her kind, in a house on the city wall, but in this case the wall that overhung the Jhelum. Her

upper room contained a long latticed balcony from which the *habitués* could smoke their *hugas* and scan the busy life of the river and spy also on those who came and went to and from the palace, at any rate, as far as the river gate was concerned. Those who frequented the *salon* of the Begum Allah Visayah were usually of high degree, gallants from about the viceregal court, captains of the horse, and the barons of the suburbs. Gossip of the better type, was always to be had at the time of morning audience, better, that is to say, so far as interest went, but in little else. Gossip is always evil, and gossip in the interior of an Eastern courtesan's residence would hardly be of the highest. But such, as it was, it had the spice which surrounds the doings of the princes and governors, and a value of its own to those who could sift the chaff from the grain. So thought the Afghan lad, Habib Ullah, of the tribe of the sons of Joseph, who lay at his ease on a crimson divan in a dark corner of the Begum's inner reception room, and listened whilst that astute lady conversed with her morning's visitors. The gossip ran on the invitations to Altamish's garden party, and what would be likely to transpire, or if it was only a social gathering. Now Habib Ullah commanded the squadron that formed His Excellency's *Khas Rissalah*, or bodyguard, a troop entirely of his own men, not connected with the Duranni, save that his sister was married to a cousin of Salabat Khan. After a while the company thinned out till chatting with the Begum were two Toork gentry only, relatives and supporters of Altamish, and regular admirers of her own. One lay comfortably on a Bokhara rug, while the other sat on a wicker stool, and both were smoking rose-water *hugas*. They had not noticed the Afghan in the corner as they entered, and when unexpectedly they commenced to talk secrets the Begum for the moment was at a loss what

to do. Then she made up her mind. Habib Ullah was very much in her toils and she—well, she cared much more for him than any other of her clientele. A handsome lad with a winning way, and a fine swordsman, who carried her favours arrogantly before all, as young men should, taking the wall to no man. Therefore, thought the Begum, he shall hear what is going, and he shall keep the secret for my sake or make such use of as he will, if I let him. So she lay back on her cushions, and the Toorki visitors commenced.

“My Lord Altamish sends you greeting. Salabat Khan, the Governor, is dead in Poonch, and my lord will himself seize the Shergarhi and proclaim himself governor in the name of the Emperor, which Emperor, Delhi or Kabul, matters not. The clansmen from the Lolab valley are even now moving in. The Regiment of Victory hold the Hari Parbat fort. It is necessary that that regiment shall either declare for Altamish or march out and hand the fort over, the former for choice. It is understood that what you will the commandant of the regiment does. Now, this is the message to you. ‘Let it be arranged that the Regiment of Victory open the fort gates to me to-morrow evening at sundown, and then march to the Shergarhi.’”

“The words of the great Khan are a law unto his servants, but this is a difficult matter, full of complications. This humble one may well lose all and her life too.”

“The Lord Altamish also bade us say, that if the Regiment of Victory came over, the estates of Pampur should be yours and a lakh of Kabul-Shahi rupees as well.”

“The Lord Altamish,” quoth the lady, “is liberal as ever, and it is true that what I will, so does the commandant of the Regiment of Victory act. But how am

I to know that Salabat Khan is really dead ? Who can appoint his successor but the Emperor of Kabul ? Does my lord Altamish defy the Emperor ? ”

“ Nay, nay, Madam ! ” urged the envoys together. “ The Lord Altamish takes the government to prevent disorder till His Majesty at Kabul sends a *sanad* * to his successor. The Begum herself knows well that Kabul is a far cry from Kashmir, and that the Emperor cares not who governs so long as tribute comes regularly.”

“ But,” again urged the cautious Begum who knew too well the road that those tread who are caught in intrigue between the nether millstones, “ the Imperial order of the Duranni is this, as all the world knows, that when a governor dies the *naib-Wazir*, who as thou knowest is the Sirdar Yar Khan, takes charge till the Imperial will is known. Thou well knowest what became of the Mooltani Pathan who took charge unauthorized when the Khagwani governor of Mooltan died of cholera.”

“ It were well I fancy to leave such points to the Lord Altamish who no doubt knows his own business, and besides has Kazilbash friends at court to support his claim. The point for us is, will you earn our Lord’s lakh of rupees and the Pampur estates, by making certain that the Regiment of Victory do as my Lord may order ? He has ordered that you have some earnest money of what is to come. By his command, I now invest you with this chain.”

And here the envoy hung round the neck of the courtesan a chain of kincob and pearls with an emerald pendant. This type of ornament, well known in all the harems of the north, was modelled after the famous necklace that Nadir Shah the Persian brought away

* Warrant of appointment.

from the Great Mogul for his Hindu lady-love who had followed him so faithfully. The pearls might vary in value, but the pattern of the necklace had become stereotyped. In this case the pearls though not large were enough to stir the envy of better women than the Begum. Her eyes glistened with desire, and she eagerly said—

“It is well, I accept the guerdon. The *Kommandan* * of the Regiment of Victory shall do as I tell him and hand over Hari Parbat fort to whom the Lord Altamish wills and at the time he wills.”

And then the Toork envoys rose to go, feeling that the less said now the better, lest the lady repent her of her undertaking, or ask for more earnest money, after the manner of her kind.

“Hush, my lords,” cried she, “some one comes ! Oh, it is my friend Habib Ullah, whom doubtless you know, of the governor’s bodyguard. Come in, Khan *Sahib*, I do but receive two gentlemen of the Lord Altamish’s following.”

And here Habib Ullah, who had heard most of what had been passing, and who understood that the Begum had meant him to do so, quietly came forward, and said—

“Gracious one ! Here have I been waiting patiently at your doorstep for I heard that you gave audience.”

The young Afghan, to whom as to all of his kind, intrigue and plot and counterplot is ever the salt of life, bowed gracefully and courteously to the two Toork nobles, saying—

“Ever does this house of grace receive the great ones of the city and the valley. May your star be exalted and your fortunes ever flourish.”

To which the Toorks replied, “May wisdom and

* Commandant.

prosperity ever remain at your disposal," and left the room, to hunt for their shoes at the stairs and pay a gratuity to the attendant whose business it was to look after visitor's foot-wear.

Going out into the street, one remarked, "That pert young cockerel is piping low to-day. Can it be that he too wants service with the Lord?"

"The devil, whom these Afghans serve, has no doubt prompted him to seek his own advantage sooner than his master's," quoth his companion. "It will be well to let Allah Visayah know that she should make sure of him too. He is young enough to be useful, and not too old to be dangerous. Besides, we want some Afghans, or we shall have trouble with all the following in the city. We can't kill them all or we shall bring the Emperor himself here. If we can square half the Afghans once we have seized the fort, then we can report to Kabul that we have taken temporary charge of the government, and have the Afghans with us, and that only those who tried to raise riot and rebellion have been slain. At the worst we can but make for Delhi, and as you know, Altamish has many Toork friends there and in Oudh."

So the two plotters rode away on their stout ponies that come from Yarkand away over the China passes by the pilgrim's road, that wonderful road from which the Chinese had come, rain and shine, for centuries to worship at the shrine of Prince Gautama, the Buddha. It is the record of these pilgrims' journeys that help us more to follow the obscurer incidents of the Teacher's life than anything else.

Altamish Khan the Toork was one of those many freelance leaders who had so constantly come out of that great Central Asian cauldron whence hardy fierce Toork, Tartar, and Mongol races had poured to the overrunning of a continent, north, south, east and

west. As had been the custom of his forbears, he, with a following of his own men to which he had added any useful knave who could handle a sword and a bowstring, had become one of the many powerful chiefs who had sold their services to Ahmad Shah, the Abdālli, who founded, on the death of Nadir Shah the Persian, the Duranni Empire of Kabul. When that monarch died, Altamish had continued to serve his successors on the throne of Kabul, and had been given estates in Kashmir, on that province being wrested from the Mogul. Now estates are all very well, but Altamish was growing old, and it was high time that he should occupy some more lucrative post than that of a mere landed baron of the Empire. True, the great muscular Kashmiri peasant farmers who were his tenants paid him fair dues and more, for they were a chicken-hearted lot, despite their huge thews, but he was too old an oppressor to overstrain the moneymaker. As much as he could wring from his tenantry he wrang, but that did not give him the wealth that he coveted to surround his old age with luxury and evil. He would fain be a governor of a province free to farm the taxes and work his will after the manner of the East. Therefore it was that he sought ever to sit in the seat of Salabat Khan, by fair means or foul, and all his following longed too that their lord might come to wealth and more estate, that each in his turn might farm some part of the revenue and oppress his neighbour in official guise.

Salabat Khan Duranni was a better governor than provinces of the Kabul Empire usually got. The Afghan himself needs ever a cruel master. Centuries of war and oppression and wrong have taught every man to be a law unto himself. Never a hint of the law of love and right doing have penetrated to these hills in which the mountains of Asia break into crests of rugged

rock and stone. To paganism has succeeded Islam in its cruellest form; and the law of Moses has long been lost. To rule Afghans you must flay them alive, men say, and gouge out their eyes, and if you would be merciful, blow them away from a gun and have done with it. And then as to be cruel is to be avaricious, those who had the power must extract for themselves just as much as could be had without the wretch turning in despair, and ceasing to be a yielder of revenue. So Afghan governors bred in this school were apt to be sore taskmasters in gentler lands. Now and again, however, the larger and more established families had come to security of tenure and estates and had sufficient strength to be free to learn. Nadir Shah, despite his all-conquering genius and his ruthlessness on occasion, had wit to see that a milder folk thrived under a kindlier sway, and the Hindu maid that touched his warrior heart had softened his ways and his laws. He had some knowledge of how to rule the people for the people. And there were men of his court and his armies who had learnt something of his conceptions. Then ever there were memories among learned men of the great Akbar who ruled as none had ruled in India for a thousand years, who dreamed of making all faiths one, and of the day when the lamb should lay down with the lion. And lay down with the lamb the lion had to in his day, in peace and honour whether he like or no, lest worse befall. But the day of Akbar had passed, and generation in generation out, ever the Mogul had grown feebler and lost his northern courage and character. However, that belongs to another chapter of history than the days of David Fraser and Maid Miriam, and suffice it to say, that Salabat Khan had had a finer up-bringing than most. He had been cared for by an uncle away up in the valleys beyond Istalif, where, to some extent, the lie

had been given to the saying that you ruled an Afghan only with scorpions. His uncle had ruled as the good barons rule, a word and a blow if you like, but a just word and a just blow. And his aunt had brought up a family of half a dozen as well as her nephew and his sister, and that with some reference to the ruth of God and the true teaching of the Prophet, who, be it ever remembered, was born of a Christian mother.

Salabat Khan, her nephew, had been appointed ruler of Kashmir, because the Emperor knew that to make Kashmir pay good revenue it was necessary to treat it fair. Fair treatment then the valley had had, these last seven years, and though the governor could flay a man as promptly as any Afghan, he never did it to his own ends, or for aught save in punishment for cruel and dastard outrage. The valley had repaid the good treatment it had received, the great rice barges bringing in the revenue came yearly to the state granaries full to the gunwale. There were more rupees in the treasury than earlier governors ever dreamt of.

It was some considerable knowledge of the history of the valley and of what did or not make a good ruler that caused Allah Visayah the courtesan to act as we shall see her. To be in the higher flight of her profession in a large and official town, was to be something more than a painted denizen of the housetop. To run with the hare and hunt with the hounds in an Eastern capital requires some steadiness of brain and of purpose, some knowledge of the hearts of men, and some inkling, however afar off, of the mainsprings of good and of evil. To be a courtesan in the East, and for the matter of that, often enough in the West, is to be born to the trade, to be born to snare men, to dance for a livelihood, and to serve as attendants at holy

shrines. From her birth the Begum had been devoted to her profession as a votive offering, by her mother, who had followed the same profession, and her grandmother before her. As also will her descendants, so long as Hinduism and Islam have no public conscience.

Allah Visayah had been brought up trained in the arts and graces as usually imparted to one of her calling. Musical by nature, she played the love-songs of Persia and crooned their sibilant words, with more than perfunctory feeling, and the poetry and wisdom of Saadi she had studied for what it was worth. To a love of music and a desire for learning, she added good nature, so that she was well equipped to acquire some amount of backstairs influence. Added to which she had in her youth spent some money lavished on her by a Mogul noble in making a pilgrimage to a famed shrine away in the snows, and had there picked up *en route*, or was reputed to have acquired, some knowledge of the occult sufficient for that useful acquisition, the fear of her neighbours.

So with some larger outlook than those who counted on their curry, and the jewels they could extract from their admirers, the prosperity of the valley and of the dwellers in the city was a matter on which she was wont to ponder. Salabat Khan, the governor, it was true, had other fish to fry than came to her net, but once he had given a judgment against her, in a case in which the whole mass of evidence was indubitably on her side, but was false in every item, purchased at a price. Therefore she knew him for a shrewd, just man, before whom the right would prevail, and knew, too, that Altamish Khan was the very reverse. Salabat Khan's death, then, she recognized as a loss, if true, and the question for her to decide was whether or no she should aid his following. Business was business,

and what had such as she to do with the ethics of state craft? Nothing, absolutely nothing, of course, and the Pampur estates, with a lakh of rupees thrown in as a make weight, was not to be sneezed at. Therefore, decided the quick mind of Allah Visayah, both birds shall fall to my stone! I will warn the Naib Wazir, the Sirdar Yar Khan, and I will also see that the Regiment of Victory shall render to Altamish the Fort of Hari Parbat.

"Habib Ullah, you have heard what those misbegotten Toorks said to me?"

"I heard, Lotus-Eyed, that His Excellency is dead, and that Altamish Khan will try by force to succeed him."

"How will he do that, Khan jee?"

"That I do not know, but he has a considerable following."

"You, no doubt, are on his side."

"I, Lotus-Eyed?"

"Well, you seem in no hurry to prevent it."

"The race is not always to the swift, Lotus-Eyed. I wait to hear more. It is easy to run into a tangle. Patience is the practice of wisdom."

"Very well. Now, Khan *Sahib*! Are you minded to keep the Afghans as governors of this province? If so, listen. Go, warn the Commandant of the Shergarhi, who himself is acting as governor, and then do you ride straight as an arrow from Rustum's bow to the Pir Panjal, by the Imperial Road, and find the Sirdar Yar Khan, and tell him. Also warn the commandant that the Regiment of Victory may not be staunch, and should on no account be brought into the Shergarhi, and also say that it might be wise to leave it where it is, as any attempt to move it may bring on trouble. Doest understand?"

"I understand, Lotus-Eyed, right well. You are

wise as ever. But is there not time that I stay a while with you, and thou shalt sing me of the Rose that fell on the Garden Path ? ”

“ Habib Ullah ! Is this a time for you and your folly ? No wonder Empires are lost and won if you would twang the zithar when you should be galloping your *Tazi* horse to the mountains ! Go, and as you and I are old friends, it is well that you should see that both of us are no losers. See that the Lord Yar Khan knows who is his friend here in Srinagar, and say also that no man knoweth yet how far this mischief has gone. Go now, lest I curse thee for a fool and sell you all to the Toorks ! ”

Then Habib Ullah, the captain of horse, took counsel of the courtesan, and sped away to the Shergarhi, and to saddle his swift *Tazi*.

And the Begum Allah Visayah thanked her stars that men are fools ever.

CHAPTER VII

ALIABAD SERAI

Soon after leaving their midday halt at Hyderabad, the cavalcade of Yar Khan and the Lady Miriam with David Fraser and his troop entered the snow line, now unfortunately soft with the full force of the sun. This made the going heavy and difficult for the animals, while the riders had to cover their faces with their puggarees lest the glare blind them and strip the skin from their faces. David had dismounted and given his horse to his orderly, concerning himself with walking beside the pony of Miriam, which was slipping and slithering at every step. After a few hundred feet of climbing, the road lay through a shaded gully where the sun had not penetrated and the hard snow was better going for the horses. David pulled up her horse to lift the feet and dig out the ball of caked snow that had collected in the frogs. As he did this he was surprised to hear her speak. The etiquette and custom of the East leads not veiled women to speak to strange men, and as yet they had not held converse. The ways of an Afghan lady of rank, however, are above the conventions that cramp the more secluded races.

"I have not thanked you, courteous stranger," said she, "for your help at the ford. Damming the water for me with a wall of men was well thought of. I have heard my father speak of such a thing when crossing

our Afghan streams, but I have never seen it done. Tell me whence you come, if you will and it is no secret. I can keep secrets too, if that be your pleasure."

And David looked up into the veiled face, and just saw the tip of a well-turned chin.

"Nay, lady," said he. "Who am I that I should have secrets, or what is there in my life that any one would care to hear of?"

"That is my business," quoth the maiden. "It is enough that I am content to listen if you are willing to tell. It is not of idle curiosity that I ask."

And again David looked up for another look of that chin and perhaps a sparkle of the fairy eyes, but the veil had closed again. Then, since ever has the female stimulated the male by draping that on which he would gaze on, David straightway desired very much indeed to catch that sparkle once more. The sparkle of bright eyes was a new phenomenon, and one that seemed worth exploring.

"Lady, your brother the *Sirdar*, to whom I have promised allegiance, knows something of my history; and there is no reason why I should not tell you. I am a *Feringhi*, a Christian Frank, who seeks fortune among soldiers with his horse and his sword."

"Then why do you not serve the Company, *Sahib Bahadur*, like the other Franks? You are *Angrez*, are you not?"

"No, Lady, I am but half *Angrez*, or *Feringhi*. My mother was an Afghani."

"Then you are of the true faith?"

"No, Lady, not as you mean it. I am not of the faith of Islam. My mother was of Islam, but became of my father's faith, to follow the Holy One of Nazareth, of whom Islam says, '*Aleh Salaam*.'"

* "On whom peace."

"Yea, I have heard of the *Hāzārāt Iswi Aleh Salaam!* and our priests say women have no souls, so what does it matter? I once heard that the Christians say that women have souls as well as men."

"My mother, Lady, was ever happy as a Christian; and the English *padre sahib* often came to see her and to pray with her when she was ill."

"Tell me more, then, of your mother and the English; and the *padre* that prayed with a woman."

So David found himself chatting away of his childhood and his father, of Danny Irvine the artillery bātman, of the soldiers and guns of the English cantonments, and of his delicate Afghan mother who had worshipped her husband and son and had been worshipped in return.

Miriam understood how she had worshipped her son; and the son his mother; but the care and love of the father for his wife, the only woman about him, *that* failed to strike a note of recognition in her conception of life. The devouring flame of the love of man for woman she understood or had ken of in the burning Persian poems that the strolling singers sang and her old nurse crooned. Ephemeral as the day, short as the summer's night, was the wooing and the passion of a Persian ballad. The lover rode away to conquests new and wives afresh, while the woman remained to cherish a child that became all that life held for her—"bangles ring softly and sadly." She knew by hearsay of the "tender ruth" of man to woman in the Central Asian plateaus. She knew, too, of strong, stern wives who ruled their lords' castles and retainers and junior wives by sheer force of character and gift of power. But that the rapture of the love-song should be followed by peace and protection till evensong was a new conception, and she must hear more of it.

Therefore the ice once broken, she became the

natural curious maiden demanding information of the stranger as simply as she would have questioned Amah Jan, her nurse and maid. And the good, simple David walked at her side answering her questions truly and naturally, quite forgetting how incongruous it all was. But then, perhaps, after all, it was not incongruous, for a man is made for a maid all the world over, and high converse is the gift of the Gods.

"Then your father had no other wives?" queried Miriam, lest she had not understood aright.

"The Christians only have one wife."

"What do they do when she is old or sick?"

"They take care of her, at least the good ones do. My father took more care of my mother the feebler she became."

"I must tell old Amah Jan that," mused Miriam. "She always said men care naught for women when they are ill, unless they are bearing sons. But your father married again when she died?"

"Nay, Lady. He mourned for her all his life."

"Amah will never believe that. She says no man grieves for a woman save the woman he cannot possess. Are all the English the same?" she added.

"All the English I knew. There were English ladies in the cantonment who came to see my mother. Their husbands all treated them well, and they came and went as they liked. Some were old and some were young, but it did not make much difference. Every one was as courteous to the old as well as to the young."

"It is all very hard to believe. Tell me now of the *padre* who used to come. We see the priests at times, and we pay them money, but they regard us as of no importance."

"The *padre*, the chaplain, as they call him, came regularly to see my mother, and talked with her of the

God of the English, and of His Son, and she used to tell it all to me when he had gone. There was always something new to tell, though she had learnt enough to become a Christian soon after my father married her."

"Tell me how your father came to marry your mother. Did he buy her, as the Persians do?"

"My lady, 'tis a curious story, and the English ladies loved to hear it, and my mother would herself tell it to those she liked. Her father was the Sirdar Ghaur Khan, *Suddozai*, of Ghor, who had ridden with two hundred of his clan to join his relatives the Rohillas. After the Abdalli had beaten the Marathas at Panipat, he rode through Hindostan for many years, living at his ease on the country, always meaning to found a state, but ever loving better to roam. My mother had ridden at his saddle-bow ever since she could remember, as when she was older on an Arab horse by his side, in front of his Amirs. Then there was war with the English, and a big battle. She was in the middle of it, and the Afghans were destroyed. My mother and her horse were carried away by some irregular trooper in the Company's Horse. An English *Sahib*, hearing screams, rode after her, and took her from the troopers. She was lodged in all honour in a tent of his, and marched for three days with the political retinue. Then my father came to her and said he wanted to marry her. She wept for her father and relatives, but said she was his slave, and it must be as he wished, according to custom. They were married according to English custom by the political officer, and then she marched with him north and south for ten years, right down through the Deccan, and when I was nine years old, to the capture of Seringapatam with Lord Cornwallis, the great English General. After that the wars were over, and we lived in English cantonments and were very happy."

"And did your mother know the English ladies?"

"My mother was just as they were, controlling my father's household, and entertaining his guests, though she ever loved to be alone. Once the great Governor-General of the English came to see her and invited her to come with my father to his house."

"And did she go?"

"Surely, lady, surely. She went in all honour after the English custom, and sat at the lord's table, and even danced with him at his big reception."

"I've heard of this dancing among the English; my nurse had a friend who had been in an English station once, but I do not understand it. But the way of the English women, it is wonderful! Your father had no other wives?"

"No; did I not say that the English never marry more than one at a time?"

"H'm! perhaps they are wise there, but to rule a man all your life, and to have no young wives, with their impudent ways when you grow old! It is very wonderful. Once there came to Birmal an old man; he was a story-teller, and played a wavering pipe. He was allowed to come to us women and play. He said that there was only the one real love, and the one real life. Perhaps he meant what the English mean. My cousin Anari said it was a poor man that would be content with the one wife, and for her part she would think little enough of him. And the other English ladies, were they held in the same esteem as your mother?"

"More or less. Always with honour and alone, but perhaps my father cared for my mother more than most; but then he knew she must be lonely among a strange people. He told me so after she died."

"Prutt! a woman has no people when she marries. We Afghanis leave our homes and go away with our

lords, and no one misses us, or cares, and our lord may do as he likes, though for all that some of us can hold our own. Your father married again, of course ? ”

“ Nay, lady. He just mourned for my mother the rest of his days.”

To this Miriam said nothing, but David saw her eyes once more, as she looked at him to see if he spoke the truth. Then, as if satisfied, she said—

“ That I will tell to Yar Khan, who always tells me that women are of no account, and that one is as good, or, as he thinks it, as bad as another. He thinks nothing but his horse soldiers and the rupee bags in my brother’s treasury are of any import. I’ll just tell him how the English ladies are treated. No ; you shall tell him. He will only just crink his pock-bitten eyebrows at me. I hate the ugly man ! ”

“ But Yar Khan must be a very firm and faithful servant to you and your brother.

“ Yes, he is, really. My brother trusts him I know; beyond all. They have been together many years. Long before he came to Kashmir, when I was a girl in Birmal, we heard how Yar Khan stood by my brother, when those wolves’ heads the Abazai drove him from Jellalabad. Oh yes, I trust him too, but he always makes me feel so very small. No, I don’t hate him either, for once I lost my pet lamb over the cliffs of the Zogi-la, when we were returning from Iskardu, it was old Sirdar Yar Khan that slung himself over in a grass rope to rescue it. He knows, too, that I hate to see animals killed, and will not allow animals to be *hallaed* * when I am there. Perhaps he thinks no Afghani should shrink from blood and pain. Surely it is always round us. When I think of all the stories

* *Halla* = made lawful food ; i.e. have their throats cut. A Muhammadan only eats meat when thus killed.

old Amah tells us, I long for peace, and a world where the men cease from slaughter. Now what you tell me of your life with the English sounds of a new world. Yet they too are terrible in battle."

"They are always victorious, true lady. But I've heard men say they ever fight for the right and protect the poor. Justice they give I know, and they prize truth and honour."

"Then why, Ferassa *Sahib*, have you left them?"

"I left them, Lady Miriam, sadly, because they love not the mixed race. I, who am descended from princes on my father's and my mother's side, care not to be looked down on as a half-breed. They offered to make me an officer in their army, but I heard two of them talking of me, kindly enough, but with pity as a half-breed. So out into the world come I, lady, as I told you, to hack my own way to power, and a name, with my father's sword and his father's pistols, and naught else save only the Holy Book, that my father gave my mother when she was baptized. Belike I shall be the first and the last half-breed of the House of Ghor, or of the Fraser *Khel*.* That, Lady Miriam, is my story."

And Miriam sat silent, her veil tight drawn, and her shapely head bent in thought, and in her heart she hoped, she very ardently hoped, that this fine young man might come by his own. Did she think that he and she might share the life of the English? She to be tended and cared for in her old age, and not turned out a-catching camels, when no longer a light o' the harem? Not she, she thought not at all of such things. The Afghani is not lightly introspective or sentimental. No! but she did think that she would like to let Yar Khan know how some folk regarded women.

* Clan.

Then, as the cavalcade crested a southern spur they came on a stony patch whence the snow had melted; and the herbage was sprouting—green down-grass and saxifrage, a tulip, and a wild violet.

"See, *Sahib*, see!" she cried. "An omen! an omen! The Prophet's flower. The *paighamber gul*! Success to all who see it first in the season."

Yes, there it was among the violets. The little five-petalled yellow flower, with the brown spot in each petal, where men say the Prophet touched it, and blessed it for its promise of spring and life after winter. To David it was a new flower and a new story, and an omen of success, since beauty and youth and enthusiasm called it so.

By now, however, the sun was setting, and the keen cold wind of sundown was blowing over the peaks. They had wound over the top of the pass, and the cairn of stones, each contributed by a wayfarer, and were descending a spur and the side of a gully. Turning a corner suddenly, thousands of feet below, lay the whole of the valley of Kashmir itself, streaked with the great purple shadows thrown by the Pir Panjal peaks. The cool keen air swept up the gully, and beautiful Miriam threw back her veil to drink it in, and let it play with her braided hair. So David the Scotto-Afghan gazed his full on that clear-cut profile and the pale olive skin with the red blood mantling under the cheek. A long, straight nose, delicate red lips, and a regular well-curved chin and clean-bred throat, showed the well-born maid of a race of rulers. And David saw that the maid was good, and worthy of service after the manner of the Franks. Also had he been deeper read in the world's history, he might have believed from that regular profile, the tale of Alexander of Macedon and his Graeco-Bactrian colonies. Women of such contour danced on the Frieze of the

Parthenon, and on the carvings on the temples in Eusafzai. But then David knew not the history of Bactria. It was enough for him that the picture was good.

Whether the breeze struck too cold, or whether Yar Khan's advent, from his place at the head of the cavalcade, was the cause, the vision was quickly veiled again. Neither pearls before swine nor beauty for weather-beaten masters of horse, are well revealed.

The night's halt had now been reached. A castellated *serai* was before them on a bare stony spur, with Edelweiss growing among the rocks. The *serai*, once the comfortable hostel of the Emperors of Delhi, was now half ruined, and drafty, but even so, better shelter than tents. The outer wall, too, would protect the horses from the night wind. Miriam and her women repaired to an inner room, Yar Khan and Fraser to a small outhouse, and the troopers tethered their horses, and lit fires of logs and fir cones round against the wall, while the caretaker and his assistant hurried to catch goats to milk, and issued hay from a stack in the yard. Soldiers and horses soon settled down to rest, and when David strolled over to his men, the horses were already eating, and fires burning merrily. Ganesha Singh hurried up to report all well, and discuss the affairs of the troop, while Gul Jan carried off his master's sword and holsters, and went over to the quarters to get the bedding unrolled.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PILGRIM HOSTS

WHILE Miriam and David Fraser climbed the Pir Panjal, and Toorks intrigued within the Holy City, a vast pilgrim host was making its way to the Sind Valley and thence to the icebound Lake of Gangarbal. That great mysterious search for peace and hope that the world is always engaged in, was here in active progress. Tens of thousands of the simple folk of the countryside over whose heads the wars of Maratha and Mogul and Afghan rolled disregarded, save as men regard plague and cholera, were hastening eagerly to the shrine of forgiveness among the snows of Haramukh and the Mountain Tarn. The hosts of the freelances, the mailed squadrons of the emperors, swept by, carrying off corn and cattle and such maids as they lusted, and ever the people went on their way and struggled to live and to multiply. The sun and the rain in due season, and the rest is the will of God ! And now at this season of the year was to be found that peace and promise of redemption that the heart of man ever searches for ; that desire and promise that lays somewhere at the back of all the creeds. The peasant and even the traders had left their shacks and their booths and come tramping up from the plains of India and through the passes and over the snows of the outer Himalaya. Old and young, men and

matrons, lads and maidens, cowherds and farmers, fishers and spearsmen, ascetic and *fagir* parents and children, "*un qui march un qui tette un qui vient*," streamed out of the Holy City and up from Baramula and over the Pir through Shapyon, and down the valley from Verinag, while Islam watched and wondered. For the great mass of Kashmir folk had long been converted by the victor's sword to the superior and comforting faith of the prophet, and looked with amused scorn on the great struggling eager masses of Hinduism, wrapt up in a faith that could lead them away to the infinite. Past the ruined Pandav temples that spoke of the ancient faith, past the almond orchards, past the great mosques of the only God, out on to the *karewa* plateau, and the dog rose and the wild thyme and the iris bloom tramped the crowd of pilgrims.

"Come brothers come for the snows are far
Come brothers come to the healing shrine
Come brothers come for the peace that endures,"

cry the priests to the swelling crowds.

And among the jostling eager folk on the Haramukh road from the Holy City, swung and lurched a screened litter on the shoulders of four bearers. In the litter sat discreetly attired the comely figure of the Begum Allah Visayah. But why should beauty frail go to the shrine by the Lake of Gangarbal amid the snows of Haramukh? "*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*." Above all, why should a Muhammadan lady, good, bad, or indifferent, seek peace at a shrine of an alien creed? And the answer would seem to be that Allah Visayah was but taking time by the forelock. She had promised for due reward, that the *Kommadan* of the Regiment of Victory, which held the Fort of Hari Parbat, should deliver it up that night to the

retainers of Altamish. But she was not quite sure that her influence would make a man put his head into a noose till he was quite sure that that noose would not draw tight. Also she had further dipped her hands into the waters of bewilderment by encouraging Habib Ullah to ride post haste to find Salabat Khan's party and tell them of the business afoot. So Allah Visayah, self-styled *begum*, though she was well enough placed whatever befell, had thought that she might be better away for a while from the holy city of Srinagar. If the *Kommadan* should fail to deliver over his fort, so much the better for the official party, and Habib Ullah was her slave. If the *Kommadan* did come over to Altamish, so much the richer would Allah Visayah be.

To rid Srinagar of her presence therefore unnoticed, the Begum had called for her litter, and had mixed with the stream of pilgrims hurrying away to the shrines and snows of Haramukh. Outside the suburbs a curtained bullock hackery awaited her. But shrines and rocky paths would not be for her. She would march with the crowd for a stage or more to the foot of the ascent and then turn her fat bullocks and her fat comely self off to a small farm she owned on the beautiful Sind river.

The tramp of the pilgrims, and the grinding of the hackery wheels of the few who made the first part of the journey in a conveyance, mingled with the grunting and grumbling of camels, the yelping of pariahs as the crowd streamed through the green plains and level upland *karewas*, past willow beds and almond orchards to the Sind. Away on the river crowds of boats were bringing their loads by water a portion of the journey.

As the evening neared and the sinking sun crimsoned the snowy peaks of Haramukh and the Zogi-lah, the wayfarers halted for the night by the roadside, when

and where they listed, so that fires twinkled on all sides in the growing gloom. At each bivouac beggars rattled their gourds and begged for food. Here under a willow tree life and death were struggling. A peasant family had halted, father and children, while the mother struggled with the pangs of labour. The *un qui vient* had been insistent. The mother had sank under a tree and a coloured cotton sheet had been stretched from the willow to the peasant's iron-shod bamboo thrust into the ground. The children hunted frogs in the marsh hard by, and the father sat silent under the tree, wondering if his wife would die and her ghost haunt him, as Hindoo mothers' ghosts who die in childbed haunt Hindu fathers, with their feet turned backward. That is how you know a *churel*, the poor feet are turned backward, and they are very bitter toward menfolk.

Allah Visayah's hackery rumbled past the pathetic little bivouac. One of the children was crying, and the lady looking out between her red silk curtains divined what was in process. Now to belong to what has been called the oldest profession in the world, is not necessarily to have lost the sense of humanity, nor of some of the essentials of womanliness. There are some worse attributes of the human sex than mere mercenary love. Away on the farm to which she was taking herself, in charge of a gnarled and doting old *noonoo*, was a small son of her own, who was an undoubted child of hers whatever its paternity might be. So the comfortable Messalina of the Holy City slipped out of her cart to do her best for the peasant mother, like any other kindly old woman of the town, by which act we may hope she acquired something on the credit side of her life record.

Troubles pass quickly in peasant life. The Begum was soon back in her cart, after giving sweets to the

children, and the mother had said she would be up and on her way in the morning with the new-comer on her back, while the frightened mumbling father stood praying to escape the *churel*, too scared to even thank the stranger. But Alatheia of the housetops continued on her way, with that feeling of satisfaction which stirs all who do good actions, and none more so than the habitual evil liver. Back in her hackery, she reclined and drowsed within her curtains smoking her bubbling rosewater *huga* and the onyx-eyed bullocks shuffled on in the soft twilight with which the rising moon was mingling. The clang of the beggars' gourds and chains and the murmur of the pilgrims had soon died away, and the jagged outlines of the peaks of Haramukh stood up clear and cold and deep black violet against the evening sky, while peace unutterable fell on the land.

But once more fate was to bring her naughtiness to the aid of the stricken. The bullocks stopped suddenly, and ran out all ways as bullocks will, and the Begum woke up with a jerk and demanded angrily what was the matter.

"Have we reached our destination? Can you see my *kothi*?" she demanded.

"Nay, lady, nay," answered her servants. "'Tis but the bullocks shying at some man who lies in the way."

"Drive on then! Drive on!" she called. "Drive on, over the sleepy beast."

And Pandoo the bullock-driver smote each bullock with a stick, and screwed their tails in their sockets till they attempted to leap forward over the obstruction.

Then suddenly a tall white figure leapt up, and waved its arms in front of them and shouted.

"*Nom de Dieu! Arrêtez! Arrêtez! Stop! Keep those cursed bullocks back, I say!*"

The white figure drew itself up to a great height, and on its forehead shone out in the darkness a lambent living cross. The bullock driver leapt from his perch on the pole of the cart, into the wild rose scrub at the side of the road. Here at last really was the devil, after all the charms he had bought to keep him away! The Begum again poked her head through her curtains and called to her servants for a light. A torch was lit after some fumbling, and a trembling domestic brought it round to the side of the conveyance. Then she looked out again and saw astride a prostrate form a tall white figure with a black skull cap on his head, a long white cassock girt with a camel hair rope, and on the forehead the fiery flaming cross. Then she knew her man. It was surely the white *Padré* of whom men spoke who had come no man knew whence, to heal the sick in Kashmir, and who dwelt unmolested in a hovel near the mosque of Shah Hamadan. She had heard people speak of a Christian priest with whom no one interfered, and of whom all spoke good, even the *moollahs* of Islam in the city.

Since all men were fish to her net she decided to speak the new-comer fair. She was on the best of terms with the *moollahs* of the mosque near her house, and would even contribute to a new levy on behalf of their shrines. The Hindu priests of the temple allowed her to provide marigolds and incense and milk and *ghee* for their *linga*. Even the holy ascetic in the garden under the Takht-i-Suleiman, had once called her sister when she had taken her small son to see the goldfish in his tank. It would be part of her good-natured business to make friends with this new form of priest also, for who knows when her little Dundoo might need doctoring beyond the ordinary.

So Allah Visayah swallowed her annoyance at being jerked from her sleep and stopped again on her road,

and asked the stranger in her most honeyed voice what had befallen, and whether she could help.

Jean Armande St. Hilaire du Plessis, late Abbé of St. Marie aux Chenes in the Province of the Loire, and member of the Society of Jesus, abandoned his angry attitude and stepped forward courteously at the sound of a female voice. Ten years at the Court of Versailles, an *intime* at the Petit Triannon, a woman's voice and its tones he understood right well. Many a high-born dame had he comforted and cautioned through life, and conducted to her stoic end in the tumbrils of Danton. The women he confessed through weal and woe, the men he had quarrelled with and shriven beneath *La Veuve*, had loved and trusted Armande du Plessis, for his patience, his kindliness, and his clear, ringing voice. "*Au nom du père, et du fils et du sainte esprit ainsi soit il,*" and the high-born head had dropped still smiling into the dripping basket. The last of his friends gone, he waited but his own order of release in the squalid Conciergerie. Then a brawl among his guards; some dying wretch who remembered the old religion had craved for a priest, and Armande St. Hilaire du Plessis had found himself outside the jail, with some one whispering a promise of life. With five aristocrats snatched from the guillotine he found himself sailing for India, his friends to sell their swords; he, the finest swordsman of them all, to seek peace of mind as a priest among infidels. From shrine to shrine he had journeyed as a begging friar might wander, ever north with the pilgrims, till he found his knowledge of drugs and simples was taking him where his crucifix failed. The year 1792 had brought him to Kashmir, at first a tolerated and now a venerated physician, a recluse and an ascetic, and as such ever venerable to the Eastern mind. In that upland valley of the great Himalaya, the abode of Snow, he had found a link with

Christianity, in that same mosque already referred to, in the shape of a legendary tomb of an uncrucified Christ. To trace the origin of that strange story had been one of his pursuits. That he was not the first to do so he conjectured, for on the current *chilki* rupees of the kingdom cut deep in the obverse stood among Persian and Sanscrit letters, the initials of the great watchword, "*In Hoc Signo Vincas*," the motto of those who raise, as he so often raised, the Cross to the high heavens. Some predecessor in the valley had no doubt been responsible for the letters, I. H. S., cut clear for all the world to see, on the Kashmir rupees ancient and mint new. Therefore the Abbé felt himself not alone in his land of exile. Some one had trod the path before, to gain influence as he would gain it, to heal as he would heal, and had left the Master's mark cut into the mould of Time.

"Madame," said the Abbé, "see! Here lies one who needs our help. No woman's heart can pass him by." And taking the torch from the Begum's servant, he held it high as he had held the crucifix. There across the road, effectually closing it to horse and vehicle, lay a most pitiful mass of rags and corruption. How it had crawled there was a puzzle. Two toeless feet wrapped in such strips of cloth as pilgrims tie to the branches above a shrine, drummed on the roadway in agony. Two fingerless stumps were flung out over the abject's head, and the noseless face emitted low moans forged on anvils hot with pain. Tied round the waist by a camel hair cord like that which girded the Jesuit was a brass herd bell that told of the miserable's approach. It—you could not say he—was a leper of the lepers. Unclean! Unclean! Nay, worse, foul! foul to horror unimaginable.

Allah Visayah drew back in horror. How much

simpler to pass the mass of corruption by on the way-side. But two facts forbade that. The bullocks would not drive on, smite the charioteer never so cruelly, and Jean du Plessis, anointed Samaritan, meant to have it otherwise.

The gift of intuition is the inherited quality of the bad woman equally with the good. 'Tis perhaps the extra endowment that has made her bad, enabled to read deeper into the evil hearts of men. Allah Visayah saw that it would pay her to play the lady gentle.

"Sir," said she, "the gods give with both hands good and evil, health and wealth, pain and death. Close here is a poor farm of mine. I have sheds and stacked straw. I will now summon some of my people to bring this"—and here she hesitated for a word—"this poor man in. Ho! Maula Baksh! Go across to the *jhok*, and call Peeroo and Pheeroo. Tell them to bring the old charpoy out of the maize field, the one that the bird scarer sits in. Will you come across, Reverend Sir, to my poor house?"

"Nay, sister," returned the priest. "We will remain and see this our brother removed to your charitable shelter. You have, no doubt, some distant out-house where he may be sheltered, and which can be burnt afterwards. Or perhaps your servants can erect a lean-to?"

The priest knew well that no person could rightly be expected to do more. It is God or nature, not man, taking vengeance for oft-neglected laws that makes the leper outcaste. If man will give food and shelter, distant temporary shelter it is the most that can be expected. So when Peeroo and Pheeroo, the twin sweepers, brought the charpoy and lifted the rags thereon, they had done more than most of their neighbours would. Then accompanied by the Abbé and the Begum the leper was conducted across to

a matting hut, and given such food and drink as could be made available. Allah Visayah then promised that he should remain in charge of her sweepers at her expense so long as he listed, and the Abbé smiled approval, and followed her to the lintel of her own house, where the child Dundoo was awaiting his mother.

But the Abbé had not come to the *jhok* for conversation or entertainment, and the leper was beyond all cure of mind or body, save the comfort of food and shelter. If this could be assured, either at his expense or the lady's, he would be content and would away up to the pilgrims' camp. Allah Visayah agreed that he might visit the leper whenever he wished, but was anxious that he should tarry awhile. She had milk and rice and hot curry ready, and all that a weary priest could need. Armande, however, would have nothing but a bowl of milk, and stayed but to look at Dundoo's eyes, fly-sore like so many children in the East. In his wallet he had a remedy, which he handed over to the mother and then sped away. The Begum was anxious enough that he should stay, but to him her position in the city was fairly well known, and her house was obviously no suitable resting-place for a priestly head. So out once more into the night he went, the phosphorescent cross still flaming on his brow. Five years ago a wandering *faqir* had shown him how to put on flaming eastmarks without burning the skin, and it had occurred to him that by this means he might connect his healing powers with a popular veneration for the holy sign. Through the length and breadth of Kashmir and far away back to India he was now known as the "*Feringhi padre* of the flaming Cross."

And this is the story of how priest and courtesan came in some sort to be allies.

CHAPTER IX

THE GARDEN OF SWEET BREEZES

WHILE Allah Visayah is leaving the Holy City with the pilgrims and scraping a chance acquaintance with the Abbé du Plessis, and Yar Khan with David Fraser are marching in to Aliabad *serai*, the doings of the *Sirdar* Altamish Khan the Toork noble must not be overlooked. We may repair to the country residence of the influential baron, situated beyond the apple orchards, behind the Garden of Sweet Breezes, which lay on the shores of Dhall Lake. There in the afternoon of the day on which we have seen his emissaries hold high converse with Allah Visayah in her house on the city wall, a garden party was in progress. To it had been bidden in all outward simplicity the chief supporters of the faction of the Toork against the official Afghan party of the Governor. On the lawn among the almond blossom the old Toork stood to receive his guests, who came over the lake by water, or else a-horseback by road. And every one who landed was first received by one Wali Dad, who was the official receiver of guests to the household, and also general procurer and intriguer to the same. And to each of the guests known to be staunch to the Toork pretensions the receiver presented a small bunch of white iris with the request that it might be worn in the *puggari*, a recognized place for the wearing

of emblems. And with every one to whom such emblems had been offered it would not be indiscreet to discuss the plans in immediate progress. The which was a sign and a portent.

Up and down the green turf under the almond trees strolled the guests, while their host chatted with them in groups or drew them aside in turn. The visitors were men of the Toork race for the most part. Almond eyes and high cheek bones showed clearly Toork or else Mogul origin. One only among them with his little knot of followers, seemed of different race. He was of dour and saturnine aspect with an eye that gleamed under deep rough caste brows.

To all who bore the white iris in their headgear, Altamish imparted the news, gradually manœuvring them down the main line of the garden fountains to where a small causeway led to a marble summer house that jutted into an inlet from the main lake. There they were safe from listeners, and the city rumour could be elaborated to exploit the Toork designs. 'Salabat Khan their excellent governor lay dead the other side of the Pir Panjal, and there was likely to be trouble enough in their beautiful state from the evil-minded among them. It would doubtless be long before orders should come from Imperial headquarters as to the successor. Unfortunately, it was rumoured that their worthy *naib* and *wazir* the *Sirdar* Yar Khan had also been killed, which left the ship of state still further dismantled. What did his friends think of the situation and so forth?' Before long it naturally was suggested that some form of provisional government had better be formed, lest disorder take place. Then it was also natural, seeing how Wali Dad, whom we have seen earlier in the day at the Begum Allah Visayah's, had duly primed suitable persons, that a suggestion should be put forward that

the *Sirdar* Altamish Khan should himself in the interests of the province and of the Empire, assume not seize, that being an evil word . . . should assume the position of governor. What, demanded another of Wali Dad's tame plotters, should be done if there was any opposition by any of the other factions, what if any of the functionaries of the present governor endeavour to usurp power? The answer was unanimous: they all must be ready to support Altamish Khan. The Khan himself now thought time had arrived to take a lead.

"Nobles and gentles of Srinagar, and the Kashmir valley, may the star of your fortune never set! I gather from what you say that you deem it in the interests of the Empire that I should assume the governorship in the place of our lamented Afghan Governor, and you believe that I shall be of service to the province, and His Majesty the Emperor. I am ready to do as you call on me. The *Kommadam* of the Regiment of Victory has also sent to know what he is to do, and if I will take charge. I shall, therefore, do my best. Now what I want is this. I want five hundred horse and a hundred foot to meet me at the garden behind the Amiran Kādāl, at seven a.m. to-morrow morning. We will then proceed to take possession of the Shergarhi after riding through the city and proclaiming myself as temporary Governor of Kashmir. I shall be myself in the fort of Hari Parbat to-night, and that will be my headquarters. Now, Murad Beg, what force will your honour bring to my help to-morrow?"

"I will come myself with my son here and bring one hundred horsed retainers and fifty match-lock men."

"It is well, most noble *Sirdar*. And what will Ali Khan Toorkoman do in the like cause?"

"Ali Khan will be there with forty Toork troopers and twenty pikemen."

"And you, my Lord Shāms-ud-Deen?"

"I, my Lord! I am, or at least, I don't quite know. . . . I am a little uncertain as to our wisdom in this matter. It is, as you well know, a rule of the Empire that on the death of a governor his *naib* is to take up the government. We are not so far from Kabul here that we can afford to disregard its rules without due care."

Altamish frowned and stamped his foot, muttering, "This man's a fool or a traitor. What the foul fiend does Wali Dad mean by giving him a white iris to wear!"

Then to Shāms-ud-Deen, "Calm yourself, my Lord! We should be the last to think of disregarding the laws and rules of the Emperor, on whom be peace and on whose name be glory! But in these days Kabul is a far cry. Tribes are up on the roads, and the Sikhs ever give trouble. As an intimate of his court I know full well that he wants peace and a capable government in his provinces. Anarchy there must not be. Our Afghan and his *naib* are dead. Besides, are we so satisfied with this government by Afghans that we should like any lesser *sirdar* to affront us Toorks and Moguls? A thousand times no! and you know it every one of you gentlemen here to-day. I declare unto you that, as it is your wish, I shall proclaim myself governor of Kashmir when I join you to-morrow at the Amiran Kādāl bridge. I shall take over the fort of Hari Parbat to-night at the request of the garrison and use it as my headquarters till we can move into the Sher-garhi. I shall rule this province so that Toork and Mogul shall have fair shares of what is right, and I shall at once send tribute and a special messenger to the Emperor on whom be glory! Not for all the

diamonds in Golconda would I wish that *sirdars* who think we are precipitate in this matter would join me. I wish all to do that which they consider right. But there is some amount of danger in this, and those who would share my rewards must share my anxieties and danger."

And here the Lord Altamish of the tribe of the Red Horde of the Attaman Toork, let his eye wander round the company. And those who looked it fair saw that behind the dreamy film of the opium habit, there shone the sign of a devil. A devil of determination and unscrupulousness, and daring also, that made each feel that he must either be truly with him or hopelessly against him and live a province or two apart. The which is the wisdom of those words where men may still hack their way to power.

"Now, gentlemen, we will return to the lawns, and you will honour me with partaking of refreshment. *Sharbat* and fruits await you, and *Azizun* from the city hath some new dancers to entrance us. Then away, and I trust you to be at the trysting place."

So the party melted away out of the summer house and back by the causeway, past the waterfalls and the stone rills and the die-away fountains, and came out into the garden where Wali Dad had been keeping occupied the guests to whom he had not given an iris. And ever he spoke of the story of the death of the governor, giving a substantial detail to what had been in the bazaars of the city the merest of rumours. 'Salabat Khan was dead and gone to paradise owing to a treacherous attack by Rajpoots the other side of the passes. Oh yes, the *Naib Wazir*, worthy old Yar Khan, he was gone too! What a soldier the man had been, but how sadly he had neglected the just interests of so many in the province! Especially had he seemed to have a malice against the Toork and Mogul. God

alone knew why, except that the fountain of justice is ever clogged in men's hearts. Salabat Khan, of course, was a mirror of justice, but what can a man do when all his advisers are prejudiced! Ah! that was a strange case when Mohammad Ali Beg had his lands confiscated, and when Bakhtiar Ali the Persian, who had received an estate in perpetuity for services to the Emperor Ahmad Shah, had woken up one morning to find a party of Afghans taking possession of his lands, and his almond orchards. Had not they heard about that? why he thought every one knew. It was one of Yar Khan's lieutenants who got the land with a title deed signed by His Excellency Salabat Khan. Well, if the latter was dead and his *naib* too, it would be difficult for the machinery of government to carry on. They did not want anarchy such as they had had even in the Imperial Provinces of Delhi within the memory of many there. He hoped some one of the nobles would feel justified in assuming the governorship, rather than a few junior officials at the castle should be allowed to carry on. What! you suggest that the Lord Altamish would be the right man? Ah! the same had occurred to him, but then he knew Altamish Khan very well, and felt that he could only do so in face of a general demand and support. He quite agreed that it was high time some one who understood Toork and Mogul interests should be in power. Anyway it would be well if the leading men in the province made up their minds. What! the Afghan *sirdars* would never agree to a Toork governor? Well, times *were* changing if a governor who had got the reins did not know how to deal with people who would not acknowledge him. Tut, tut, even my Lord Altamish, who wished all men well, and was a mirror of justice such as could only be found in history, *he* knew well enough what to do in a case like that. But

he knew, too, that his master would be very shocked at such a suggestion unless he felt the Toorks and Moguls were all behind him.'

And such-like and so forth, talked Wali Dad the wily, and all the while keeping an eye on the mysterious stranger with the small following who had not as yet talked with any guest. He, Wali Dad, did not know who it was, but Altamish knew, no doubt, and had forgotten to tell him. He had not been given an iris too for the same reason. However, he was sitting away there and did not seem wishful to intrude. He was now sitting under a chenar tree with his followers behind him, playing with two magnificent *tazi* hounds, with which Altamish would course hares on the higher plateaus above the Jhelum river. Harmless for the moment, Wali Dad let him be, having already set two of his own special myrmidons to watch him.

By this time the guests were returning from the meeting in the summer house in the lake and began to mingle with those whom Wali Dad had been entertaining. The latter at once led the way to a large awning or open tent with side walls enclosing three sides of a portion of the lawn. The ground below the awning was provided with settees and cushions and covered with rugs from Persia and Bokhara. At the back were waiting attendants with cooling sharbats of many fragrance, samovars of brick tea from Kashgar, and brass trays piled with fruits. And while the bearers served the refreshments there glided on to the carpets Azizun the beautiful dancer of Srinagar on whom Altamish had lavished much of his wealth, and who in her turn provided for his entertainment the best of her profession whenever her master needed entertainment other than her own.

To be born of a long line of dancers of purely matriarchal descent, for so many generations that all

count is lost, is to have every nerve and muscle, and indeed every instinct of the body working to every inspiration of the dance by intuition. When to such a descent be added great personal grace and beauty, it is to be imagined that the dancer so endowed is likely to be an influence of no small weight in the circles in which she moved. In the eyes of the Eastern world the beautiful dancer lives without soul, without caste, without religion, a thing of beauty, a plaything, a useful instrument, a mistress, but by no possible stretch of imagination or play of feeling could she be given a status. To power and wealth they come and have come through the ages like the most glorious flowers of the universe, to die away in due season. Children they have, who become dancers and have children in their turn to unknown fathers and behind them lies this curious matriarchal descent that no one heeds. A race apart, never admitted to be human any more than those outcaste tribes who scavenge, and who are in reality but the aboriginal folk whom the great Arian invasions contemned to be ostracized as hereditary menials.

Out of this vista of dancing female ancestors, the beautiful Azizun had sprung, and had early been trained to her profession. She had cast her toils over many of the young nobles of the valley, among whom to maintain a dancing girl was quite the most fashionable thing to do. The power and wealth of the Lord Altamish the Toork, however, had made her his for so long as he pleased, or as she intended, so long as she pleased, and her influence and weight was considerable. It is one of the curiosities of Indian history that the wholly worthless dancing girl, void of all religious or moral teaching, wholly a parasite of evil, leaving the world in due course as the sea wave turns to foam, should often become the most influential

adviser of a ruler. Disowned and ignored by the respectable women of the *zenanas*, they have flourished ephemerally as flourish the red agaric in the shade of an autumn wood. For two years now Azizun had twisted Altamish round her slender olive finger with the orange-tipped henna-stained nail, which was more than the three maidens who shared his legal board and bed had ever been able to do. A considerable penny it had cost him, though still he called his loss a gain. And all the while Azizun danced exquisitely as well as ruled wisely, and knew where her frontiers ran, and where lay foreign land, which is more than most of her profession know, or her sex either for that matter. And Azizun while she danced kept also her professional eye open, and had secured as a disciplined following the best of the coming dancers in Kashmir. Their training had been perfected under her own eye, and Altamish wise in his generation had arranged that they should dance for his supporters on those velvet lawns by the Dhall Lake.

So as the sharbats circulated, Azizun and her maids glided on to carpets and stood jinking their ankle bells before the admiring nobles. And with them came the makers of sweet music, retainers of Azizun also, chosen for their understanding of the more languid and amorous tones of the pipe and zithar. Three of them shuffled up behind the *peris*, the man with the dole or tom-tom leading, a grey-bearded old *habitué* of the courts of Delhi, well practised to throb the drum exactly when most effective. The other two were younger musicians, the piper with a ragged unkempt beard and a black reed pipe, the man with a zithar clean-shaven with eyes deeply lined with cosmetic, of a vacuous unclean lear. Wholly unclean, wholly lecherous and loathsome all three, but permissible in that they understood their art to perfection. And that

art was the making of haunting seductive amorous music that all the world, for its sins, could understand.

Then commenced one of those swaying insinuating nautches, which to the English are often unspeakably dreary and wholly unintelligible, but to the Eastern mind are fraught with all the love and passion and lust and high-drawn suggestion, that ever Persian poet dreamed of. And the dance told a story, commencing with the loneliness of a young captain ever condemned to frontier guard, longing for the scented delights of the city bazaar. And ever his desire grows, and ever the dreary rocks of the frontier fall, till some errand leads him citywards to woo some beauty frail beneath whose verandah he sings in vain. And then despair and desire seize him, when lo! a rival fair appears and casts a lure, at first unheeded yet ever more attractive till at last the lover begins to feel the spell of the entrancing provoker. Then as the fire leaps to new fuel, the inclination of the absconding soldier becomes fiercer and ever more ardent, and the charmer ever more compelling, till he gives himself body and soul to the personified goddess of incarnation.

The dancers elaborately and sinuously dance their interpretation of the story, now swaying slowly with eyes closed and balanced arms, as the despair of the captain is depicted, changing to the motion of a hurrying serpent, and the violence of love defeated. Clash go the castanettes, and loud throbs the *dole*, and then as despair is greatest the slow insinuating motions of the new enchantress. Ever the *spielman* pipes, and the zithar twangs, and you can see every muscle under the soft olive skin and transparent muslins of the girls. Azizun leads the motions as fogleman, with arm and ankle and bosoms moving to the pipe in softness and in frenzy.

That it is all very high class performing is evident

in the intense gaze of the onlookers, and the low sounds of approbation. Azizun is undoubtedly an artist of the very first grade, with a figure and grace beyond compare. And of all those who looked and admired not one could have given birth to a thought that this beautiful and graceful creature was in any sort a human being with any claim to any of ordinary heritage of the human race. Any existence beyond that of the butterfly was absolutely denied her in the opinion of each and all, from the greatest to least in that Eastern land.

With a clap of Azizun's hands the music ceased, the girls glide away and the musicians shuffle after them, ere the audience could realize what it was all about, or give vent to the chorus of *Wah! Wah!* 'Undoubtedly the Lord Altamish understood their needs and also the secret of hospitality. Never had they been so well entertained. Without fail he was the man to rule among them. He would see to their advancement and knew how to amuse them. He must, of course, be king,' the which is a story as old as ancient Rome, and the wanderings of Israel in the peninsula of Sinai.

With the conclusion of the nautch, it was obviously time to go, and the guests hastened to take their leave, whispering assurances of their presence the next morning at the Amiran Kaal without fail. In fifteen minutes the lawn was empty, save of the sardonic stranger who still fondled the dogs under the walnut tree, unmoved by the music of the entertainment, Altamish hurried over to Wali Dad.

"Who is your friend *Bakhshi Sahib*?"

"Surely, my lord, he is your friend."

"Not so, I know him not. Have you an armed guard handy? Let us ask his business."

Seeing that he was observed and that some one

had leisure to attend to him, the stranger approached and saluted.

"I have business," said he, "with the Lord Altamish, I would see him alone, and have an introduction to him."

"The Lord Altamish is not in the habit of seeing strangers alone, sir," quoth Wali Dad.

"Did you say strangers, young sir? I am no stranger to his lordship. My greetings to the Lord Altamish and ask him who stood by with the bow string to help get rid of the widows of his brother at Sultanpur."

Here Altamish stepped forward in sudden dismay.

"Enough! enough! I will see this gentleman in my own room;" and he hastily led the way to the door of his own dwelling, Wali Dad following, and taking the precaution to see that half a dozen of the household retainers were about with their arms, while the stranger's retainers joined a group of their grooms and horses at the entrance to the courtyard.

CHAPTER X

THE NIGHT ON THE TOP OF THE PASS

IN the bivouac on the top of the Pir Panjal, the horses had finished their corn, and the more weary had lain down. Those of David's troop had bedding, and all but one mare had taken advantage of it. He had stayed once with his godfather in the Irregular Cavalry of the Bengal Presidency. From him the main principles of horse-mastery had been learnt never to be forgotten, and the troop horses showed it in hard firm flesh and clean-cut muscle. David came out of his quarters to find Yar Khan looking at the horses. A fir cone fire was blazing at the back of the horse lines, and a dozen troopers crouched round warming their hands. The glare of the fire lit up the Afghan's face. The shadows of the pock-marked features, made the pits in them stand out like the dark seas in the moon. One fierce eyebrow had the firelight, and the close grey beard died red with henna, red mingling with grey, also stood out to the fire light. Temper, character, decision, were marked in every angle and corner of the figure that stood four-square to the night breeze. Yar Khan was born to be the hand behind the curtain. Reliable, faithful, shrewd, a type of man to be seen hidden in the gloom of the wings on the stage of history through the ages. A believer in might, but with a shrewd instinct if not of the justice that alone brings

to might its rightful inheritance, at any rate of how far the rights of subjects must be respected. It was chiefly due to Yar Khan's support that Salabat Khan had reigned as governor of Kashmir for six years. His predecessors had averaged eight months. The wealth of the valley, and the meekness of its peasantry, had made it too easy a prey ground for those who would grow rich quickly. Salabat Khan of Kabul and Yar Khan his *wazir* and deputy had kept the turbulent colony of nobles and their retainers in order for six full years of the Muhammadan calendar. Land was being broken that had not felt the plough for five hundred years and more, and the State granaries were full to bursting. It was a good two years since any noble had dared raid a Kashmiri girl from any of the dab and matting villages of the plain. Yar Khan or the governor might order a levy of maids, that was another story, done in due form as a matter of fair barter, but it was not to be done at will. Therefore the nobles murmured against the governor, and wished him ill, but no man murmured twice in the hearing of Yar Khan. His ways, however, were the ways of Central Asia, which are not the ways of Europe, save perhaps that the disembowelling of a living rebel chief in the market place in the year 1800 did in reality differ little from the execution of the English gentlemen on Tower Hill who had been ill-advised enough to join the clansmen from the north at Carlisle in the attempt to revive a defunct dynasty, the which fate had overtaken two uncles of David. To be hung and quartered and the still beating heart torn from the body before a yelling London crowd is not very different from a disembowelling scene in the main bazaar at Kabul. All of which David Fraser may or may not have thought, if he did think at all on such matters, but the Abbé Armande du Plessis, who had seen the

tender heart of beautiful *La Lamballe* on a pike, found little to choose between the tender ruth of Cross or Crescent.

All of which is as may be. Certain it is that Salabat Khan and Yar Khan his *wazir* and *naib* or deputy, kept the peace with some ruth in Kashmir, and the people knew it. These methods, good or bad, were the methods of the East. That set jaw of the *wazir's* under the stubbly red beard meant soldierly qualities; and it was with some approval that he watched one of David's troopers on sentry, pace up the horse lines. Among the Afghan horse, their animals tethered any fashion, and the saddlery flung aside carelessly, there was little to attract that appeal to precision which the real leader understands. As David came down through the rows of horses Yar Khan accosted him.

"Good evening, young sir! You are looking to your horses? That is right. Lucky for my loons here that they have hardy horses or it would fare ill with them."

"*Khan Sahib*," replied the young man, "I early learnt that no soldier should rest or break bread till his horse be cared for."

Here old Ganesha Singh sprang to his feet, the troopers round the fire with him, standing to attention. It was evident to the Afghan that the action meant respectful obedience to their commander. It was new to him, but he highly approved of it.

"Ah! You've picked up this discipline of the English. I have never seen their troops, but I hear of a thousand bayonets moving as one. I begin to understand. Your services will be very useful to us here. Tell me, *Ferassa Sahib*, do you understand cannon?"

"Certainly I do, *Khan Sahib*, so far as working them goes; but I cannot cast them."

"Never mind the casting, we have a *hubshi** in Srinagar who can do that well. He came from some Maratha foundry in Agra. Our trouble is that we have no one who can use our guns properly. I want to expel our artillery commandant, who is quite useless, but I've no one to put in his place. Can you train me a man?"

"I can try, *Khan Sahib*. They say an Arab makes the best artilleryman. Have you any?"

"One or two, but none of them worth their pay. Come and look over the wall here and tell me how to point a gun that will defend a steep approach. Our Hari Parbat guns are not placed right, I know."

Now, Hari Parbat was the citadel of Srinagar, the one garrisoned by the Regiment of Victory.

The two walked over to the grey stone wall of the *serai*, and peered into the shadows below—shadows that accentuated the white frosty light of a moon that was nearly full. It was still and clear, and down below a horse's footfall could be heard displacing an occasional stone, as some horseman scrambled up the steep path. Then the sound changed to the measured cadence of a tired horse on level or slightly rising ground, "three-ha'pence and tuppence, three-ha'pence and tuppence."

"That horse is going lame," said the Afghan. "Do you hear him? 'Dot and carry one, dot and carry one.' He is on the level piece about three-hundred yards away."

And the sound continued to re-echo, "three-ha'pence and tuppence," till the still night air was alive with it.

"Call two of your men here," continued Yar Khan; "and come, let us stand just within the *serai* gate. Bid them bring their arms. I know not who would

* Negro.

be coming up this hill at such a pace. There is some trouble in Srinagar, I'll be bound. I begged the *Sirdar* to put Altamish in chains before we came away. That accursed hound is the father of all the evil and half the lies in the state."

The sound of the tired hoofs had died away, the rider must now be scrambling up the last short ascent to the *serai*, that had frozen slippery since the sun went down. The two Rajpoot troopers whom David had summoned stood with their lances at the charge across the gateway. Yar Khan and David stood within the gate in the shadows of the wall. The sound of the hoofs again became clear, and in another minute a horseman arrived with panting steed in front of the gate, and nearly rode on to the two bright spear-points, to call out hurriedly—

"Ahoy! watchman ahoy! I seek shelter in the name of the Governor of Kashmir, His Excellency the *Sirdar* Salabat Khan. Who are these who block the way of his messenger? I want fire and shelter and forage. Let me and my horse in, in the name of the *Sirdar*."

"Let him in! Let him in!" said Yar Khan; chuckling to himself to see the steady lance points of the two well-disciplined troopers.

"It is young Habib Ullah, who is commandant of His Excellency's bodyguard squadron. He is all right."

"*Anne do!** Lal Singh! *Anne do!*" called David, and the lance points fell away.

"Come in, Habib Ullah Khan, come in. It is I, Yar Khan," and as the tired horseman slipped from his horse, the old Afghan stepped out into the moonlight within the gate. Habib Ullah rushed forward to Yar

* Let him come.

Khan, and *salaamed*, and then turned to David to call out excitedly—

“Your Excellency! Your Excellency! Praise be to God you are here. They said you had been killed by Rajpoots.”

And the young horse-soldier seized David's hand in both his own. “Tush, fool!” said Yar Khan. “Tush, be quiet. Who are you talking to? This is not the *Sirdar*.”

Habib Ullah stepped back and looked at David.

“If it is not the *Sirdar*, it is his own brother. I do not understand.”

Yar Khan looked at David. “Pish! The boy is right; in this light there is a great resemblance. However, whatever brings you here, young Habib Ullah? Come inside, and stop chattering outside. We are talking like women round a well. Let one of your men take his horse over to where mine are.”

And so the three withdrew to the small out-quarter in the *serai*, and Habib Ullah Khan of the *Khas Rissalah* told his story. It was merely the story of his hidden presence in the *salon* of Allah Visayah, and the added interpretation of that lady. Of this naturally the young captain of horse told as much as properly pertained to the main subject.

To Yar Khan the threads, partly bared by Habib Ullah, were clear enough. Altamish Khan he knew for a pig-swine of the worst type whom he would long ago have sent the way of all flesh had he had his way. But His Excellency the Governor had some conception of *haute politique*. He had believed Altamish to be very much hand and glove with the Mogul party, both in Hindostan and at Kabul, and too powerful to be removed except as a last resort. The lesser evil had seemed to be the continued existence of Altamish. So Altamish had laughed in his evil sleeve and Yar

Khan had had to content himself with such knowledge of his ways as a well-organized underground service could purvey.

"You don't seem to have done much," he growled at the young noble.

"My Lord, what was I to do? Who am I to take your place? You were reported to be on the passes near. But I have given two orders in your name. First, I told the commandant of the Shergarhi that it was your order that on no account was any man of the Regiment of Victory to be allowed into the Palace on any pretext whatever. Further, that he should not quack of this order to any one. Secondly, I saw *Kommadan* Rung Khan of the artillery and told him that it was your order that a salute was to be prepared for, in readiness to fire to-morrow morning. Also, as private information, that I believed that some one had told you that his war supply of ammunition was wrong and that you might be coming to inspect it. He thanked me and swore all should be in good order. One more thing happened as I came out of the Poplar Avenue, by the watermill. The tinker folk were there, that gang which goes round snake-charming at the fairs. The old woman who tells love chances—perhaps you know her, *Wazir Sahib*?" Yar Khan snorted. "Well, some of us know her, and she called out to me, 'See the rats leave the falling tower. Whither away so fast, *Kommadan jee*?' I stopped casually and said, 'Why mother, to meet His Excellency, of course.' Then she sidled up along my horse and whispered, 'And what of the Lord Altamish?' I said, 'Late again, mother, and here is five rupees to tell the town so.' So you see that the tale has been spread."

"By the kirtle of the blessed Fatima," said Yar Khan. "This boy is not quite the fool he looks. He ventures to give orders in my name. Some day

I shall make a man of him, a real man. What sign did you give the *Kommadan* of the palace to make him sure that the order was imperative?"

"Why, *Wazir Sahib*, I have a seal here that is something like yours. I showed it to him and made an impression on his court circular. I smudged it."

"If this young officer is not bowstrung or blown from a gun, one of these days he will rise to power. However, a truce to this, we must get to work. How many troopers have you, *Ferassa Sahib*?"

"Twenty, sir, all good men."

"And I have half as many again. Humph! Fifty men is not much to make a show with. We must try and get His Excellency back, ill or well. If he cannot be seen within twenty-four hours, half the garrison and all the city will believe him dead, and I doubt we can hold the place long against *Altamish*. If he is alive I can raise the city and valley. If he is dead or believed dead, nobody will care. To them an ordinary baron is as good, or as evil, as another, and it is a far cry to *Kabul*. It is the peasantry and the merchant who know what *Salabat Khan* has done for them."

Yar Khan strode up and down the room in his anxiety, the glow from the log fire again throwing up the ridge and furrow on his face, and his eyebrows seemed to meet in one long scowl of perplexity. At that moment a knock sounded at the door. *Habib Ullah* sprang to see who waited. At the door stood a veiled woman, who intimated that the *Lady Miriam* had heard that a *sirdar* from *Srinagar* had ridden into camp with important news, and she wished to know what it was, and also to see the *Sirdar Yar Khan* at once.

The *Sirdar* frowned and muttered under his breath.

"May the fiend fly away with women. Their ears are so accursedly long when they scent news, and

curiosity drives them wild, high or low, rich or poor, drat them! Tell the gracious lady that the news is trivial, and that the *Sirdar* is loath to disturb her to-night. And hark ye, my girl! here is five rupees, and get the princess to bed quietly. Nay, stay! Don't let her undress, but keep her quiet for a bit. All you pretty things are a nuisance."

The waiting woman stepped into the middle of the room.

"Thank you, my lord, for your gracious words. The lady Miriam will herself hear the news, and give her own message . . . Nay!" said Miriam, who had now slipped off the waiting woman's veil, and had only her own thin veil across her eyes. "Don't try to quiet me. Some one has told me that my brother himself has returned. How can that be?"

Yar Khan made a grimace at David, and assumed an air of resignation.

CHAPTER XI

A COUNCIL OF WAR

THE Lady Miriam, as has been explained, was a wilful woman, even Yar Khan had admitted that, and knew that she was not to be brushed aside lightly. So pocketing his disgust at the arrival of a petticoat, however desirable, he accepted the situation, and gazed kindly on a lass that had acquired a freedom almost unknown even among Afghan women.

"Lady," said he, "as you know so much, I agree you must know all. There is greater trouble in Srinagar than we anticipated. The *Sirdar* Habib Ullah Khan who, as you know, commands the *Khas Rissalah*, His Excellency's bodyguard, has but now ridden in to say that Altamish Khan has spread the tale that Salabat Khan your brother is dead, on the far side of the Pir Panjal. He intends to proclaim himself Governor, and has probably got possession of the Hari Parbat fort. God send he has not got the Shergarhi palace also! I intend to go straight into Srinagar now to see what can be done, and do take you with me, as your presence may have some effect, at any rate on our own supporters. Oh, that His Excellency were here! if only in a litter?"

Miriam's eyes twinkled at the calm way in which her movements had been settled.

"I am ready to start at once." Prompt action she could see was needed. "Can we get my brother up

to us? Even wounded we shall find his counsel the wisest, however bad his sword arm be." And here her eye fell on Habib Ullah, who at once made obeisance. She knew him by repute for one of the liveliest rustlers of the vice-regal court.

"Aha, *Sirdar Sahib*, you have ridden promptly."

"Gracious lady, it were needed. Your brother's presence, to be seen of the people, is badly required. Yours is the next best. When I first saw this distinguished stranger in the moonlight, I thought it was His Excellency, and my heart leapt."

Miriam looked at David. It has been mentioned that he had some general resemblance to Salabat Khan, who looked, however, some years the older. Miriam had noticed it in a casual way when she first saw David at Thana Mandi. In the dim firelight of the little room, the resemblance noticed by Habib Ullah was the more apparent. Her quick wit saw the connection.

"It is true! It is true! This stranger is like my brother. He shall ride with me to Srinagar to-night, and we will proclaim that His Excellency has returned, and all the people shall see him ride through the city. How say you, *Wazir Sahib*," said she turning to Yar Khan.

The audacity of the suggestion had taken the *Wazir* by surprise.

"Pish!" muttered he, thinking that there could be no doubt but that women were angels of evil. "Lady, the wisdom of your house is always great, but——"—And here the wooden logs burst into a blaze, and a jet of light shone out over David.—"By the Prophet's shoes, lady! there is something in what you say. The lad is *very* like His Excellency, younger, but like. Wait here now, and it please you, till I return."

And Yar Khan, *naib* and *wazir* to the Governor of Kashmir, strode out into the cool night air to consider the startling suggestion. It was rather beyond the ken of even his experience to have to stem a rebellion with a missing governor and then to find a substitute to hand. Miriam's suggestion was novel and bold, but it undoubtedly offered a prospect of success that nothing else showed. The arrival of Yar Khan and party would in itself hearten up the Afghan party it is true, but it could only result in some form of civil war in which they might or might not be successful. There was no leader of any influence. Yar Khan was clever enough to know his own limitations. He had not the personality necessary, and he knew it. A trusty adviser, a staunch servant, a daring subordinate leader, a judge of men and their evil ways, he knew himself to be. He was the most invaluable assistant that ruler and leader could have, but he missed the divine spark. The art of command was not to him. And marvel of marvels he knew it. He was quite capable of holding the valley for Salabat Khan wisely and determinedly, and intended to have a very fair try to do so, but a wavering populace would not come to heel to his call.

Therefore the daring proposal of Miriam came as light from heaven. Manage a puppet king who would give orders and sit at the head in another's robes he felt quite equal to. It might be dangerous for the substitute, but what were men made for, and no one really cared a straw whether or no this young adventurer did lose his life in the game. A nice boy. Oh yes! quite a nice boy. In fact, he had been more attracted by him than ever he could remember in the course of his life, but this was a serious matter in which likes and dislikes must be disregarded. The thing must be gone through with, and that without

delay, that was quite clear. Exactly how they had best act, must be settled on as they rode along. Miriam should come with them, which would effectively corroborate the likeness of her brother should there be any inclined to doubt Fraser's face on its merits. None of her tiresome women should come, they must follow after. There would be other women in the palace ready to receive her, if they got there. Pshaw! Got there! Of course, they must get there. There could be no failure.

So arguing, Yar Khan paced up and down in the moonlight, till his ideas took shape. Being a man of action, he decided that they must give the horses two hours more rest and then ride hard. He therefore issued orders that all men were to be roused in an hour and a half's time, and then turned back to the quarters where he had left David, the *Sirdar* Habib Ullah, and the Lady Miriam.

While Yar Khan had been pacing outside, Miriam had been putting Habib Ullah through a searching cross-examination, much to that young officer's surprise. Masterful women, excepting always the Begum Allah Visayah, who belonged to a class apart, were a new phenomenon to him. Beauty frail and fair he understood, as well as the two quiet little Mussalmani women to whom he was married, and who lived far away in the Punjab. Here was a lady of high degree, with a way of her own. Habib Ullah at once proceeded to pay attention and answer categorically. How had he first heard of the plot? He told her, not sparing her niceness in his relation of the incident. What did he think of Altamish and his party? Did he expect the *Kommadan* of the Regiment of Victory would give up the Hari Parbat fort? What did he think the people of Srinagar would do? Would they at once support the Governor if they thought

he had returned? To this latter question Habib Ullah returned a very emphatic affirmative. He had no doubt that the return of the Governor, if he had really been seen to have returned by reliable witnesses, would have an immediate effect, which confirmed Miriam in her determination to make them dress Fraser to act the part of the returned Governor.

David sat silent while this cross-examination was in progress, much approving the quiet determination of the lady. The suggestion was not ill-pleasing which would place him in such intimate relations with so charming a companion, as promised to result from the proposal that he should impersonate her brother and ride with her in that capacity through the streets of Srinagar. It was not, however, till Yar Khan reappeared that the difficulties of the position became fully apparent. In ten minutes from the time that that prompt individual had left them, he was back again, with most of the subsidiary details clear.

"Lady," said he to Miriam, "we will start as you suggest, in two hours' time. The difficulty that I find is to prevent our arrangement and our secret being known. The whole of my men know Ferassa *Sahib* well, and they must therefore be let into the secret; then, of course, all his own men must know. That is too many for a secret, and the whole thing is bound to get out. It won't matter so much if we can keep it secret for the first few days, till we get the situation in hand, but it must not get out before that. We must leave a good many of our men behind, though we can ill spare them. Whether it will be best to send Ferassa *Sahib's* men away, or our own, I don't know. He can, perhaps, keep his own men from talking, while we could, perhaps, keep ours; but with the two parties I see no chance of it."

David said nothing, but he felt that there was sound

sense in it all. Secrecy—that would be the difficulty. He naturally did not want to be parted from his own men, especially in a position likely to call for very considerable strength of character on his part, when a sound backing of his own would greatly stimulate his self-reliance, but he would wait. Happily, the keen wits of Miriam were at work.

“If I did not know how wise in all counsel you were, *Wazir Sahib*, I should say you were quite stupid to-night. How many men be there who know that the *Sirdar* Habib Ullah Khan mistook *Ferassa Sahib* for my brother? That was the first occasion, I understand, that the likeness had been noted?”

“The only man who could have heard was *Duffedar* Faiz Ullah, who was in charge of the gate guard, and opened it for the *Sirdar*; the sentry could not have heard. I hope Faiz Ullah has not been talking.”

“Very well, then, *Wazir Sahib*, my suggestion is as follows: Let *Ferassa Sahib* go away with one or two of his own men, who must be told, with the purpose of carrying a message to my brother. Then in an hour’s time let him ride in as my brother, recovered of his wounds sufficiently to ride. We can tell the men that he had had an inkling from other sources of the trouble in Srinagar, and has hurried in to put it right despite his wound, which had taken a turn for the better.”

This fresh contribution to the possibilities of the situation set Yar Khan thinking again for a few seconds.

“By all the people of all the Books,” quoth he, “this lady is a wonder and a fit sister to a governor of a province. It shall be as you wish. *Ferassa Sahib*! Do you ride out as soon as we can get you disguised and dressed like His Excellency. Take with you a couple of your men, and I will send two of mine.

One of yours and one of mine will go on together with a message to His Excellency. You shall merely turn back on a pretext in a few minutes and ride in with one of your men and one of mine, who know the secret, and return to us as His Excellency."

David had been listening intently, but had an amendment to suggest.

"What good will it do my taking out four men of whom two are to go on? I would rather that the men to go be sent off first. Then I would start with the two men who are to return, telling them before we start of what was in progress. I would further suggest that you should accompany me out and that you meet the Governor coming in with two retainers and escort him in, announcing his return to all the men. My men will think that I have gone off to Poonch and missed him. At any rate, Ganesha Singh shall account for my absence."

"Well thought of, *Ferassa Sahib*," cried the Lady Miriam. "That will be splendid, will it not, *Wazir Sahib*?"

And Yar Khan, who had a distinct preference for being the guiding spirit himself in matters of action, rather testily admitted that it would be splendid.

The next thing to do was to settle preliminaries and get together the clothing for David to wear. Fortunately a good deal of Salabat Khan's clothes were with the party. Miriam had these unpacked ready for old Gul Jan to take them outside the *serai*. Ganesha Singh was sent for, and the whole situation was explained to him, and he was pleased to admit that the situation was a pretty one, and one that it would become *Ferassa Sahib* to do well in. The remaining details were quickly arranged. David was to set out in his own clothes, and his orderly would carry the change. Miriam readily agreed to travel without her women,

for the spirit of adventure in her was fully roused. In half an hour David and old Gul Jan left the *serai* with Yar Khan. Half an hour later Yar Khan shouted to the sentry not to fire, and came in with a couple of horsemen, announcing to the guard as he did so that His Excellency had ridden after them in spite of his wound, owing to rumours of trouble in Srinagar. And sure enough there was the well-known figure of the Governor, with the blue and gold *lungi* on his head that he always wore, and the heavy silk-embroidered sheep-skin mantle trimmed with astrakhan. The men crowded out from their shelters and the camp fires. They had now heard the news of the trouble in the valley, and the sight of their chief was inspiring enough. Gul Jan came in to Ganesha Singh to tell him that Ferassa *Sahib* had sent him back to say that he would not be with them for a few days, but that they were to take all orders from the *Sirdar* Yar Khan, which wondering somewhat they were prepared to do.

The wounded Governor, stiff and weary after his long ride, was assisted down from his saddle, saying that he had met David and had changed horses with him, as his (the Governor's) horse would carry the latter down the frozen slopes the better, and that David had gone on urgent messages for him. It was now close on midnight, and Yar Khan had arranged to start at a half-hour after. Six of the Afghan troopers would remain with Miriam's two women, and the heavier baggage and the rest follow on in the morning, while the others rode straight for Srinagar. Miriam and Yar Khan took the wounded Governor inside the quarters and settled some of the preliminary plans. They three would ride together, followed by David's own men, while half the Afghans under the *Sirdar* Habib Ullah Khan would ride in front and a similar party in rear. Miriam looked at David with

a grave air, despite a twinkle at the back of her eyes, and said—

“Ferassa *Sahib*, you really are extremely like my brother as I remember him, perhaps ten years ago. Do you feel equal to the part?”

And Yar Khan added, “You will have to ride officially through the city, when we have straightened out this matter of these dog Toorks, and then you will have to hold your Durbar at once. This His Excellency usually did twice a week. We shall, of course, prime you with information as to whom all the officials of the state are. Should we be discovered, we shall rally round you till the last. If, however, all goes well in quelling this insurrection, it would be possible to you to take to your bed to recover from your wound, while I manage the state.”

“And oh! Ferassa *Sahib*,” exclaimed Miriam, “you will become such a friend to my brother if you are the means of saving him from this cowardly plot!”

And there was sufficient glow in the firelight to show a very real glint in the Lady Miriam's eye that went straight to David's virgin heart. That great swell of determination to do well and right for the right's sake that lies in every man, stirred within him. It has stirred many a heart before and since, and it is often a woman that touches the string that looses it. Most beautiful and many less favoured women have the power if they are in themselves worthy of it. Children and weaklings also call it forth in the civilized heart. Some men have the gift. The Stuarts had it by personal magnetism, others have it from strength and straightness of character. David Fraser had been moving through the world more or less aimlessly, looking for some object to which to devote himself. Here unconsciously he found it. That woman *qua* woman

was mixed up with the discovery he was as yet too unsophisticated or inexperienced to realize. But old Andrew Fraser and Sultana Aluri his wife had built up before they died some promising clay for the potter to mould.

CHAPTER XII

THE NIGHT RIDE

At half an hour after midnight the small cavalcade left Aliabad *Serai* with horses none too fit for the purpose. They had twenty-five miles to make, and some five and a half hours to do it in, which, as the descent to the level would take a couple of hours, would leave them but three and a half hours for nineteen miles. However, it was important to be in by six, when the first shimmer of dawn was showing, to forestall Altamish at the Shergarhi, and if possible to regain Hari Parbat, supposing always that that post had gone over to the Toork Party. This information would probably not be forthcoming without an actual visit there, but Yar Khan trusted to events to guide him so far ahead as that. The first thing was to get his party off the slippery slopes of the mountain, which, melted during the daytime, froze at night like glass. The horse-shoes had been roughed at Ratan Pir, but the nails were already worn nearly smooth. As a start Yar Khan led the calvacade, while David commenced by leading Miriam's horse, a proceeding which that high-spirited young lady seemed to think quite suitable. It was slow work slipping and slithering down the frozen mule path, but at last the old stone temple on the lowest spur was reached, standing out as a landmark in the moonlight. All was

silent, not even a *chiragh* * burnt on the shrine, and the deep bells and conchblowers were hushed, and the wooden roofing glistened in the hoar frost. Below the temple the road broadened somewhat, and the gradients became less severe, so Yar Khan halted on the grass beyond the shrine to let his party close up, for it had straggled considerably on the narrower road. As it was, one horse had come down and broken a leg, so that its rider would have to follow on foot to the Shergarhi.

Not far below the temple they came out on to the flats at the foot of the mountains, which gradually slope to the Jhelum, and began to quicken their pace to some six or seven miles an hour. Gul Jan rode to take care of Miriam, with one of her brother's men also, and David went forward to talk over the situation with Yar Khan. That nobleman was in a fairly communicative mood.

"See here, Ferassa *Sahib*, we shall slip along now, I hope, till we get close to the Shergarhi. We will then ride straight in there if possible, and see that all is well. Inayat Ullah, a Populzai, is in command. He has with him perhaps fifty men of the palace guard, and the whole of Habib Ullah's squadron, except the thirty men we had away south of the Pir Panjal, of whom, as you know, we now have eighteen with us, less that fool who let his horse down a while back. We have your twenty men, which makes thirty-eight or thirty-seven. We can rely on the rest of Habib Ullah's men, whom, as I told you, are His Excellency's special bodyguard, which will give us from sixty to seventy sabres more. There are our three hundred men in the Hari Parbat, whom we expect that thief of a *Kommadan* will take over to the Toorks. The

* Small earthen oil lamp.

rest of His Excellency's troops are scattered over the province. We have a garrison up at Gilgit, the Prophet alone knows why, for those hill tracts are not worth it. We have troops up at Skardu, in Baltistan, on the China road; we have men at Uri Fort on the road to the Punjab, down the Jhelum valley. Then those troublesome Sikh settlements at Muzaffarabad always want a garrison. So you see we have not much in or round the city. As it is, we are lucky it is not autumn, when half those we have would be out getting the revenue in. Of course, Altamish would never have tried this on if he had not thought the people would believe the story of His Excellency's death."

Here one of the orderlies rode up with a message that the Lady Miriam would speak with Yar Khan, so that old man dropped back. As he did so Ganesha Singh rode up, and ranged himself alongside David.

"Ah, Ganesha Singh, old soldier! I wanted to see you. Have you anything to say or suggest?"

"Not at present, *Sahib*. Save that I have been talking to the Afghans, who all think you have got very thin as the result of your wound."

"There is no question of doubting my identity?"

"Not in the least, *Sahib*, and I heard that old Euzufzai *duffedar* remark that he always said His Excellency's Persian was a disgrace to an educated Afghan."

"Aha!" laughed David. "Lucky for me that Salabat Khan's was bad, for I know my Persian is none too good. I think my Pushtoo is better; what do our troop think of my disappearance?"

"They are a little disappointed that you are not with them. At the worst I shall have to tell them, but I have given them great promises of the service and position you will receive from His Excellency, and how, if all go well, there may be promotion for all."

"Humph! I hope we may be able to fulfil your

promises. They are certainly in a fair way to get adventures, if that be their wish."

"Ah, well, *Sahib*, I used to go recruiting for the *Sirkar*, and if I can't manage young soldiers I am not fit to be your *ressaldar*. I can tell fairy tales and make them come true, too. All shall be well."

Presently Habib Ullah rode up to David, and said—"Your Excellency, it will be well if I ride with you for a while, or our Afghans will be wondering that you have none of us with you."

"Come along, Sirdar *Sahib*, with all the pleasure in the world. Come and let me practise my Persian with you."

So while the cavalcade moved along at a steady pace, Yar Khan reined in his horse till Miriam came up, and then drew alongside her.

"Your ladyship sent for me?"

"Yes, I did, *Wazir Sahib*. A terrible idea has come into my head. I see great difficulty in front of our scheme. How long will it be necessary for *Ferassa Sahib* to impersonate my brother?"

"Well, lady, it may be a week, more likely ten days, for I doubt if His Excellency can be fit to move within that time. Of course, if we find all is well and can hold our own, then we must send a litter for him. I told him so in the letter I sent this evening."

"Well, there will be a difficulty, and you, you foolish *Wazir*, you forgot, oh you quite forgot, my sisters-in-law, His Excellency's wives. You know what an inquisitive, tiresome woman *Alana Bibi* is. *Nur Jan* we can manage."

Yar Khan swore aloud. It was quite true he had forgotten those infernal women. He had moved for the most of his life in scenes in which women were always an encumbrance. His attitude was always the same. They were an encumbrance and an evil. The

Lady Miriam alone came into a different category, and that only at times. To Yar Khan there was no inner house with almond-eyed women and round fat little children, no young son to teach hawking. Once, long, long ago, before the small-pox had marked his face like the surface of a full moon, there had been a small tower and homestead with an apple orchard and willow trees away in Badakshan, with an almond-eyed wife and a round fat son, the dead spit of all other round fat sons. Then while he was away there had been a raid of manstealing Toorkoman tribes, and he returned to find his henchmen dead and his house burnt, and not the merest trace of his wife and child. For three years he had tracked those Toorkomans through rugged mountain and windswept plain, never to find the *kirri* * he searched for, though taking full vengeance of the race when and where he met them. Which redoubled his desire to get the better of the whole of that race, as represented by the Lord Altamish and his adherents, as may well be imagined. Such was the life story of Yar Khan Suddozai, and how it was his heart and his head had become as hard as iron, out of touch with all woman-kind, saving always at propitious moments the Lady Miriam.

"Lady," replied he in some chagrin, "it is true, we have forgotten the ladies of the household." Mark the "we," that the lady might share the obloquy of the admission. "A murrain on all women, say I, saving your presence, lady, for they are always a trouble. How shall we deal with them? They will be all agog to hear the story of his wound and this attempt at a rising from His Excellency's own lips. If we tell them the truth, it will be all over the palace in an hour."

* Nomad camp

"We must try and think out some plan. We could keep them quiet for a couple of days. Perhaps the best thing would be to say he was ill in his own apartments, and that he only wanted Nur Jan. She could stay and nurse him, and I could keep her in my apartments and tell her the truth."

"Humph!" said Yar Khan. "You'll have the Bibi Alana tearing the house down; and the Lady Nur Jan's eyes out, if she thinks the other is preferred as a nurse to her. Perhaps it would be best to send for the she-devil alone, and let her into the mystery. The Lady Nur Jan will keep her disappointment and injured feelings to herself."

"Poor Nur Jan, I had rather have it the other way; and see my lady in a tantrum, but I expect you are right. Nur Jan is as a cushion of velvet, and will be quiet; we certainly can't tell them both, except as a last resort."

"We shall have the Bibi Alana falling in love with this young Ferassa; that will be a pretty kettle of fish to plague us."

"I should certainly hope," said Miriam, who received the suggestion coldly, "that my sister-in-law would do nothing so foolish or so unseemly. I am surprised at you, my Lord, suggesting it."

"Tut! tut! lady, I did but jest. I must to the head of the column now, and I will turn over in my mind how best to act."

All this while the steady pace had been continued, past frosty fields, and silent hamlets, from which only pariahs took notice of them. Through walled gardens and orchards, and over the level *karewas* and water channels, till they were at the Jhelum level, and dew instead of frost glistened on the trees. It was past five when they arrived at an open space at the end of a long line of Lombardy poplars, which told them

that Srinagar could not be more than three miles off. Yar Khan called a halt for the cavalcade to close up, and then ordered the nosebags to be put on the horses.

"We can spare ten minutes here, Ferassa *Sahib*, and we could afford to lose that even if it were later, for the sake of freshening up our horses."

The men dismounted, fumbled with the nosebags, waved their cold arms, and wrung the night dew from their beards.

"We will make straight for the Shergarhi first, to see what news there is, and see if all be well. This white mist will soon thicken for an hour or so, or I am not mistaken."

Twenty minutes' further trot brought them to the high corner bastions of the Shergarhi, which loomed especially inaccessible in the sheer, amid the white river mist, which had, as Yar Khan had foretold, got thicker as the first trace of dawn lightened the horizon. The fort was alert. From up in the bastions came the nearing call of the sentries passing the watch. "Number one, and all is well!" away faint in the fog. "Number two, and all is well!" came nearer, and then in the bastion above their road, "Number three, and all is well," to die away again down the wall. Yar Khan was satisfied. Inayat Ullah Populzai knew his business, and his men were evidently on the alert. That should be remembered to his credit. There were more empires lost by carelessness than by want of statesmanship.

Number three, too, had apparently announced the approach of horsemen, for when Yar Khan challenged the main gate, it was the *Sirdar* Inayat Ullah who answered, and the parapet between the gate towers bristled with musket barrels.

"Who challenges?" called the *Sirdar*.

"I the *naib*, and His Excellency," answered Yar

Khan, and the *Sirdar* recognized the well-known voice. But caution was caution, and Yar Khan might conceivably be impersonated, or might—hardly conceivable—be in the plot of which the young soldier Habib Ullah had warned him the day before. So wise Inayat Ullah said—

“The enemies of the state are many, and come in strange guises. I would see your faces, before I open my Lord’s palace gate.”

“You are wise to be cautious, old friend,” replied the *wazir*. “Put out a torch and see.”

And presently a torch was thrust out bound to a lance, and the *Sirdar* within saw the well-known faces, standing afoot in the gloom holding their horses.

“Now, Allah be praised,” cried the *Sirdar*, and the great spiked gates rolled back to admit the Governor and his escort. But just as they were about to ride in an object crawled forward from out the fog, and cried, “*Dohai! Khudawand. Dohai!*” *

The party stopped instinctively, and a wounded Goorkha bent at David’s foot. His head was covered in coagulated blood from a sword cut on his forehead, and he thrust out a bleeding arm stump.

“Justice and mercy,” he cried. “I have come from the fort of Hari Parbat.”

“What has happened? Speak, wretch!” said Yar Khan.

“At the third watch this morning, I was on guard at the gate, when the *Kommadan* of the Regiment of Victory came to my post. I am a sepoy of that regiment. He said to me, ‘Open the gate,’ and I opened it. Then in rushed a party of Toorks, who cut at me, and attacked the remainder of my guard. We have half a company of Goorkhas in the regiment,

* Justice! Lord, Justice!

and we were all Goorkhas on the guard. They killed them, I could hear their cries, and they never hurt the *Kommadan*, who rushed on with them, 'saying the regiment is yours, saving only these accursed men of Nepal.' Then I crawled out of the gate, and the blood from my head blinded me and I lay faint for a while, and now I have come to my Lord."

And David said, "It is well, thou faithful soldier. Take him in, and care for him. Now we will ride straight for the Hari Parbat. How say you, Yar Khan."

But Yar Khan thought the young man moving too fast, with too little reference to himself, and at first demurred. Again David urged that prompt action must be taken.

"If that fort is known to be in Altamish's hands, we shall have the city believing that I am dead. We must recover Hari Parbat, and then we can tackle Altamish, if indeed he be not within the Hari Parbat itself."

And Yar Khan yielded. For the moment affairs were moving too fast for him.

"Very well, your Excellency, so be it. The Lady Miriam will now leave us and go to her apartments."

But he had counted without that lady. She had enjoyed the fruits of excitement and action for some hours now, and she was not going to be relegated to a back seat at the nautch.

"The Lady Miriam will accompany His Excellency and his soldiers to the Hari Parbat, and will then ride with him through the town that all the world may know that we have returned and the story of His Excellency having been killed is untrue."

Yar Khan shrugged his shoulders, as well he might, and said nothing. If the Lady Miriam had made up her mind, there was nothing more to be said, and it was

only one more example of the eternal tiresomeness of feminines. So he contented himself with demanding of Inayat Ullah an account of the number of soldiers available for duty in the fort. Of these the sixty men forming the balance of Habib Ullah's bodyguard squadron were ordered to join David's party, and after some sharp instructions to Inayat Ullah as to the care of the palace, the party struck off again to Hari Parbat, by the road which would cross the river Jhelum by the Amiran Kādāl. Now it will be remembered that it was near to this very bridge that Altamish was to meet his friends that morning, and accompany them to seize the Shergarhi, and generally take steps to insure that Altamish should be accepted as the *de facto* ruler of Kashmir.

CHAPTER XIII

THE REWARD OF REBELLION

THE sight of the wounded Goorkha from Hari Parbat stirred men's minds to anger. The troopers muttered and loosed their weapons, and looked at David as hounds look at their master. There were now ninety lances in all eager for action. David was talking with the Lady Miriam.

"Lady, I insist, and the Sirdar Yar Khan, our real master, insists. You must remain in the palace. This is no woman's work forward now."

"Ferassa *Sahib*, and you, *Wazir Sahib*, understand me once and for all. I am with you and this party, to help impress on the people of Srinagar that my brother has returned. Ferassa *Sahib* here is not exactly like Salabat Khan, being slighter and fairer, but he is sufficiently like if I ride by his side. What does an Afghani care for danger! I insist on coming."

Yar Khan shrugged his shoulders. "The girl is right, *Sahib*. She is necessary to make the deception sure. Let her come and she will. It is best so."

To David the determination of the girl was a revelation. Anxious he would be, with her on his hands, but stimulated certainly, since what he had to do would be done in her company. At any rate, the sooner they were off the better. It was with a sigh of relief that they saw Yar Khan climb into his saddle and give the sign to march.

The white mist lay heavy and the daylight could do little to pierce it, till the sun should get high above the horizon. They clattered through the gardens of the suburbs down the cobbled streets and over the Amiran Kādāl bridge, without meeting more than a half score of townsfolk muffled in their blankets, too cold to wonder who took the road so early. Through the main town and out through more suburbs the party sped for an hour, to find themselves without incident at the foot of the hill of Hari Parbat.

During the ride David and Yar Khan had been discussing a plan of action, but it was not till they were nearing the fort that their ideas came clear.

"There are three separate things we might do, Ferassa *Sahib*, and the longer you look at them the less you will like them. First we may ride to the gate and demand entrance in the Governor's name. Do you think that will be listened to? More like a bullet in your abdomen. Again, we may simply advance to the attack, try to blow in the lock of the gate with our pistols and scale the walls. You are an old enough soldier to see little chance of success in that."

"True, Khan *Sahib*, that is not a soldier's course under the circumstances."

"Then, Sir Captain, we must try artifice. We must present ourselves, or some of us, at the gates and demand admission in the name of Altamish."

"I see what you mean. A small party, even two or three, get in and hold the open gate?"

"That is about it. Let us send Habib Ullah first; he is well known as a frequenter of courtesans' courts, and they will believe that he is in the revolution. He and this *Kommadan* are probably boon companions."

"I like not the sending of others, Khan *Sahib*, on an errand a man should do himself."

"Tush, lad, I know it." And Yar Khan laid his

hand on the other's bridle arm. "But all must bear his share. There will be plenty for you to do, and this man is the man to do it. Leaders cannot always lead. Habib and half a dozen of his own men must go first and try and get the gate open. Call him up."

Habib came up, and David gave him his instructions.

"Habib Ullah Khan. You are best known to the *Kommadan* of the fort. You are to go and try and get the gate open. We shall be close behind. As soon as we hear a shot from you we shall rush in. Can you manage it?"

"Excellency, it won't be my fault if I don't get in. Oh yes, I know the *Kommadan* well. We play at *shatranj* together."

They came to the turn in the approach. A round tower loomed distinctly through the mist.

"Now, Habib Ullah," said Yar Khan, "remember. Straight up to the gate and demand admission with a message from the Lord Altamish. Say who you are and that you have brought six of your own men with you. Say, too, that you have news that His Excellency is really dead, and that you have transferred your allegiance to Altamish. That will go down. If it does not, we are no worse than we are now. And I don't think that Altamish himself will be up at the fort by this hour. So off with you, and may Allah protect you."

"I will take Muhammad Akbar Ghilzai with me; and the five men in his section. . . . Here you, Muhammad Akbar! Hand over your horses to the men behind you. Loose your swords, and come here round me."

So saying, Habib Ullah explained to his little party what he intended to do, while Yar Khan stood by and nodded approval, and David listened over his shoulder. In five minutes Habib Ullah and his men moved on

up the paved roadway. And Yar Khan followed with David and the rest of the troopers, less only horseholders and three soldiers under old Ganesha Singh, left as personal escort to Miriam.

Yar Khan and David were to follow as close to the gate as the fog would permit unseen, and then wait for the sound of a shot or a summons from Habib Ullah. Yar Khan, who had stepped slightly ahead, soon found that he could make out the blurred outline of the gateway, and returned to halt his party. For five minutes—five slow minutes—they waited, David watching the rigid face of the older man with some interest. Then a pistol shot came down the breeze, smothered to some extent by mist but clearly a pistol shot. Yar Khan called to David, and his men, and they doubled up the remainder of the causeway. As they advanced two more pistol shots came down to them, this time distincter. In a minute more they saw the gateway open, with a struggle in progress.

Habib Ullah had obeyed instructions, and walking boldly up to the gate had loudly called to the guard to admit him. An officer of the garrison from the parapet above, outside the guardhouse, called out to know who sought admission.

"It is I, the *Sirdar* Habib Ullah Khan, commandant of the bodyguard of the late Governor Salabat Khan. I have now joined the newly declared Governor of Kashmir, the Lord Altamish. I have come here by his direction to wait on the *Kommadan* with certain orders and instructions, I also am to place the five men I have with me at his disposal should he desire their services."

This address had been sufficient. The door had been opened, i.e. a small wicket in the main gate studded with iron spikes to prevent elephants from pushing it in, and Habib Ullah was bidden to advance

with one of his men. The moment, however, that he had got his foot inside the gateway, he called to his men, who rushed in and jammed the door open. Habib Ullah then fired his pistol into the guard inside, who were drawn up across the inner gateway. Taken aback, the latter broke into the courtyard leaving both gates in Habib Ullah's hand. But the officer of the guard who had spoken to Habib Ullah from the top of the gateway, now saw that he was in for serious trouble, and calling on his men to follow, threw himself on Habib, striking with a doubled-handed sword at the latter's head. Habib Ullah had but time to throw up a weak guard, which was battered down, bringing him to his knee. Seeing this, the dumbfounded guard rushed in with shouts on the small body of new-comers. But Habib Ullah's shot had brought David and the others on the scene. Arriving at the wicket gate, they soon rushed through, David and Yar Khan leading, the former excited but restrained, the latter alert, set, and determined. Yar Khan rushed straight at the officer who had struck down Habib Ullah, and settled his count with a jab from his Afghan knife well under the right rib. By this time the whole garrison had been alarmed, and came rushing to the alarm post, seizing any weapon handy. But the arrival of Yar Khan and David had effectually broken through the resistance at the gateway. Four of the guard lay gasping out their lives on the cobbled roadway, and the remainder had given way. Two of Habib's men lay badly wounded just inside the outer gate, and Yar Khan was trying to form the men up preparatory to taking on the garrison.

"Wait!" said Yar Khan to David laconically. "Wait! Stand out in front of the men."

And David did so. Then that which Yar Khan had anticipated came to pass. The garrison was almost

entirely composed of the Regiment of Victory, to whom His Excellency Salabat Khan was a familiar figure. As David stood out in front of the men there was enough light for his figure to be recognized. At once a murmur arose, and then the cry, "The Governor himself is here ; he is not dead." The *Kommadan* rushed forward aghast and threw himself at the Governor's feet.

Then David took the situation into his own hands. "What in the name of the Prophet does all this mean ? How is it that I, the Governor of this province, have to force my way into one of my own forts ? How is it that my Goorkha soldiers are maimed and murdered, and what has *Kommadan* Muhammad Khan of Kohistan, whom I placed in command of the Regiment of Victory and of the Fort of Hari Parbat, got to say ?"

Some one had lit a torch, and the white morning mist and the gloom of the gateway were lit with its spluttering glare. The scene was a weird one. The great grey walls and towers, the arched gateway, the orderly line of soldiers behind David, the confused and dazed garrison before him, and at his feet the grovelling, prostrate figure of the *Kommadan*. Yar Khan saw that the tide had turned, and he strode out on to the space in front of David.

"Fall in at once, the Regiment of Victory. Fall in on me as marker. Sharp now ! Double !" And the regiment flew, and in three minutes was drawn up by companies.

"The Regiment of Victory will salute His Excellency the Governor ! Present—arms !"

And with almost tearful alacrity the mutinous regiment returned to its fealty, and delivered a ragged though earnest salute after the manner of the West, that had drifted East through French and English officers. And all the while the wretched *Kommadan* grovelled at the Governor's feet. His Excellency the

Governor took no notice, but gravely returned the salute and then called out—

"The Regiment of Victory will resume its duties as garrison of Hari Parbat. Fall out the officer commanding the leading company with twelve men." And he did so.

"Pick up this grovelling wretch and let him stand in custody before me."

And Yar Khan stepped out from the post he had taken at the head of the now repentant regiment, and placed himself alongside David.

"Hang him out of hand over the gateway," he whispered. "You give the order, and I will see it carried out." Then seeing that David looked aghast, "If you hesitate, we shall not win through with this."

To David, still young in years and ill versed in the bitterer side of partisan warfare, the position was a trying one. Here he was called on to be judge and jury within the space of a few minutes, and to condemn a fellow being to immediate death. But as Yar Khan had said, it was touch and go, and the situation just trembling in their hands again, must be clinched. Besides, there were dead Goorkhas, whose blood cried aloud for vengeance, and the *Kommadan* was deeply committed.

Turning to the now trembling wretch, he said, "Muhammad Khan, *Kommadan* of the Regiment of Victory, and of the fort of Hari Parbat, how comes it that I find my fort in rebellion held for another, and my faithful Goorkha soldiers murdered?"

"My Lord, mercy is yours to give, and yours alone. I believed you were dead. Altamish the Toork sent word to me that you were dead, and that he was the new Governor by decree from the Emperor. He bade me follow his orders."

"Did he bid you kill my faithful Goorkha soldiers?"

Then the *Kommadan* saw that the game was up, and made one wild appeal for mercy, which David, whose beating heart was for the moment steeled to all thought of clemency, disregarded.

"Oh, *Wazir Sahib*, listen! I hereby sentence the *Kommadan* of the Regiment of Victory to be hung forthwith on the main gate of this fort, as a warning to all who would tamper with my authority."

Yar Khan the *Wazir* promptly ordered Habib Ullah to take the *Kommadan* to the parapet over the gate and hang him there, while he himself remained at the head of the wretch's regiment. Without a moment's delay the *Kommadan* was hurried up the steep steps to the rampart above. Three willing soldiers of the body-guard tore down the flagstaff on the top and ran it out horizontally from the battlements over the outer gateway, turning the rope that wrapped the staff into a noose at the end of the pole. The *Kommadan's* hands were tied behind him, the noose placed round his neck, and within five minutes of the order for his execution, Muhammad Khan Kohistani was thrown out through the battlements and swung choking over the main gate of the post he had held so faithlessly.

Just as the foresworn commandant thus paid the penalty of his faithlessness, the Lady Miriam, whose impatience would allow her to wait no longer, rode up to the gateway with Ganesha Singh, to whom a trooper had brought news of the successful occupation of the gate. Ganesha Singh was anxious that she should not see the struggling wretch at the end of the rope, but it was too late. With a shudder of horror, she demanded what it could mean.

"Mean?" said the old Rajput. "Why, lady, it means that His Excellency is coming by his own again; listen!"

And as they listened they could hear the men of

the garrison cheering lest worse befall. Riding into the courtyard she found the apparently enthusiastic and frankly loyal garrison being inspected by David, and Yar Khan preparing some written orders with the help of a writer. Two Toorks, emissaries of Altamish, who had been in the fort, were being dragged out from where they had hidden and were being lashed together. Yar Khan and David had decided to send half the Regiment of Victory down to the Shergarhi with the two Toork prisoners, while Habib Ullah and twelve of his troopers remained with the other half of the Regiment in the Hari Parbat fort. Habib Ullah would stay in command. Directly the written orders for the Shergarhi were ready the party would start for there, and the Governor's party move down for their ride through the city, His Excellency and the Lady Miriam side by side. As David finished examining the ranks of the regiment, he looked back to find Miriam on her horse with Ganesha Singh riding from the gate towards him. He turned towards her with pride and pleasure, pride that she should see him carrying out his assumed rôle with success, pleasure he did not quite know why, save that he always experienced a pleasing exhilaration in her presence. Then with these feelings mingled one of horror that she had seen the wage of the faithless, hanging a horror and offence in its wait for the morning sun.

"Lady, I much regret you should have come up here, the gateway is no sight for a woman."

"Ah, *Ferassa Sahib*, I have been born an Afghan long enough to know that blood is demanded often with or without cause. I am now content if I feel that men deserve the death they die. We folk of the mountains have not yet learnt to rule and be ruled as men say you of the English rule. But your Excellency"—and here a dainty smile shone through the

corners of her veil—"I am not addressing you as a subject should address a Governor of an Imperial province. You have done well, my Lord, right well to re-assert the Imperial authority in the face of those who usurp it. What next do we do?"

Yar Khan had now come up, well pleased with the morning's work.

"Lady, it was not right that you should have come here without my orders, or rather those of His Excellency. Eh! but you're a wilful baggage, and have seen for your pains that which were better hidden." For even rugged old Yar Khan knew that women were best spared the harsher sights of the world.

"We now start for the city, as soon as the sun lifts this mist. We ride by the Great Mosque, the market place, and the temple of Shah Hamadan. Now comes your share, for your presence will effectively mark the fact that your brother has returned. Your Excellency, all is now ready, and I have given all the orders to Habib Ullah, and the *Subahdar* who will march these prisoners to the Shergarhi. Also, Your Excellency, I have found a bag of *chilki* rupees, the property of Altamish. If it be your wish, I will distribute them to the Regiment of Victory to buy sweetmeats."

"*Sirdar Sahib*," said David, "it is my wish that my regiment be given the wherewithal to entertain themselves, the more especially at my enemy's expense. Let it be as you desire."

And then the party took to horse.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE STREETS OF SRINAGAR

As the Governor's party left the Hari Parbat by the gateway above which swung dead and cooling Muhammadan Khan, the *Kommadan*, a vision wonderful broke upon their eyes. The fog had lifted from the hilltops, and was fast dissipating, though it still hung like cotton wool on the city below. From the top of Hari Parbat hill the great ring of mountains stood out clear and majestic, rose-red in the risen sun. The Dhal Lake, where lay the dwelling of the Lord Altamish, was still bathed in fog, but the circling mountains caught the light on every fold. The clean, morning air blew fresh in their faces unclogged by the mist, and to David brought a sense of determination and a yearning for high endeavour. The Lady Miriam, riding by his side had bared her head to feel the breeze, as she had done once before in his presence stirring again thereby his admiration and his enthusiasm. The beautiful profile stood out clear cut in the rising sun and spoke of the true and steadfast spirit of the maid; spoke, too, of the ancient Greeks in Bactria who could leave such beauty behind them. Then David felt that it was good to be alive in such glorious air, and good to have such a face to serve, good to be young with the world to conquer. To a beautiful face men attribute a

beautiful soul, and ever look for the motive that shall spur them on to high endeavour and to yield their best. The desire for female beauty is at best the desire for a compelling deity in whose service men may strike their best notes. So when David Fraser, half-breed of two mountain races, saw fully bared for the second time that beautiful high-bred profile of the Lady Miriam, he knew that he had seen the talisman that was to evoke the very best that in him lay.

And when Miriam saw the look of homage and devotion in the young man's eyes, she was first fain, maidenlike, to draw her veil over head, but then laughed and desisted, throwing conventionalities to the wind, and said—

"See, oh Excellency! see our beautiful Kashmir lies at your feet. See the Dhal Lake below you where emperors have rowed the ladies of their court. Far away in the corner under the mountains is the Garden of Pleasure, to which you also shall be rowed, and over the other side is the Shalimar, where great Jehangir held his summer court. Say now, sir, if our valley is not worth preserving."

To all of which, David, still backward to follow the talk of fair ladies, had little to answer. What he did say was trivial enough, to the effect that he was here to render such help to her and hers as in his power. But he thought the more, nevertheless, and as they wound down the roadway his soldier mind was busy with how to tackle the forces of the Toork if such were to present themselves in the city. Before long they began to pass from the clear morning air of the hill to the white mist which still remained in the lower regions, but was fast dissipating even there. By the time they had arrived at the main street and started to clatter through the city it was clear enough for them to be recognized. It was evident that the story

of the Governor's death had been diligently spread. The puzzled look on men's faces as they first recognized the Governor himself was proof of that. But there could be no doubt in their minds. The Governor himself with Yar Khan, the *Wazir*, and the Lady Miriam, were actually riding through the city accompanied by the bodyguard of cavalry! The story spread like wildfire. Those who were about to set forth to do homage to the Lord Altamish, whom rumour had appointed to the vacant office, had decided to postpone their action. The Governor was there, sure enough, wearing his well-known blue and gold *puggari*, with him that old *wazir*. Ha! there was some story last night about the fort of Hari Parbat, but, however, that must have been wrong. In front of the great mosque some hundreds were assembling for prayer. To them the sight of the cavalcade was a welcome one. To the people generally the Governor was a popular entity, and loud acclamations greeted his appearance in state. One Toork trooper, however, who had ridden up to find the crowd cheering, and who was himself a newcomer to the valley, imagined it was the *cortége* of the Lord Altamish or one of his principal adherents. He had come to town specially to support his compatriots who were, so his summons ran, taking possession of the governorship. Here was evidently one of the nobles going to join the new governor, or perhaps the governor himself. A good opportunity for him to show on whose side he was and gain notice. So, poor lost soul, he urged his horse forward through the crowd, shouting, "Fortune to the Lord Altamish! Long live our new Governor! Success to the Toorks!" His horse caught the excitement and took him bounding up to the head of the column. So ominous and threatening did this appear that it looked like an attack on David. Whereon old Ganesha Singh flew at him and

struck him down with his sword. Down went the rash Toork and the passing troopers thrust at him with their lances, and then the crowd closed on him. God help those who fall among an excited crowd! Very shortly the wretch's head was off, and an Afghan loafer in the crowd held it up. "What offers for the head of a rascally Toork?" whereat the crowd pleasantly at Toork expense, and one of the rearmost of David's escort took it a-top his spear and carried it there unknown to those who rode at the head of the cavalcade. Yet, as emblems go it was not a bad one, when authority has been reshaken and is coming by its own again.

Near the mosque of Shah Hammadan there was a larger crowd, who cheered, and to whom the head on a spear was unmixed delight. Attracted by the noise, the Abbé himself, who had returned to his quiet hovel to see some of his patients, emerged into the street. He was but in time to see the tail of the party with the Toork head on a pole, and a strange shudder it had given him. Heads on poles had been frequent enough sights in the Terror, but especially did it strike a painful chord in his memory, since he had seen the beautiful head of the Princess *de Lamballe* waved at the window where he had been sitting with the royal party, listening to the howling crowd that they could not restrain. Difference enough, true, between the head of a wild worthless Toork trooper and that glorious golden head of poor beautiful *Lamballe*, save that both had been cut off in the heyday of life, but for loving memory of the one poor head, Armande du Plessis demanded the other of the trooper who carried it lance-high. Whereon the latter, knowing the mysterious white *padré* who cured the sick, when all other *hakims* failed, threw him the head as a man would toss a bun to a bear, and the *padré* took it and wrapped it in cloth and hid it to give it decent burial later in the day.

Now it will be remembered that at seven o'clock on that very morning Altamish was to meet his supporters with their available men-at-arms, on the other side of the Amiran Kādāl Bridge on the Jhelum river. But the foggy morning, and the rolling mist had sent many off the road, and Altamish and Wali Dad and his own retainers had to wait for a couple of hours and more while the parties slowly dribbled in, and Altamish himself foamed and fumed at the delay. He was soldier enough to know that if success was to smile on his endeavours they must be promptly and vigorously carried out. Among those who had joined him was the mysterious stranger who had put in an appearance at the garden-party the day before in the Garden of Sweet Breezes. That stranger, it will also be remembered, had shown some mysterious power that Altamish had at once given way to. As the latter with the stranger sat in the gardens on the far side of the bridge watching the mist roll away and inwardly cursing those of his supporters who for one reason or another had failed at the *rendez-vous*, the head of David's party came into sight. Never dreaming but that they were some of the missing partisans, Altamish and the stranger galloped towards them. It was too late to break away before Altamish found himself, to his intense astonishment, ranged alongside no less a person than the Governor of Kashmir, His Excellency Salabat Khan, who on the surest information he believed to be lying wounded on the south side of the Pir Panjal. Yar Khan had been quick to recognize the *sirdar*, and at once signed to half a dozen men to surround the party, and at the same time whispered to David, "It's the Lord Altamish, that infernal Toork, speak him fair."

And once again David rose to the occasion.

"My Lord, you are well come indeed. I hear some

tales of rebellion and of factions who would supplant my governorship. I am indeed satisfied to see that you are about in my interests. Know you ought of these alleged disturbances? My troops here would gladly have at those who would harm me."

"Nay, your Excellency! I have no knowledge. Over the way are some gentlemen assembling with a view to putting their retainers at your Excellency's disposal. Allow me to present this gentleman to you."

And here Altamish drew back, and the mysterious stranger was visible, and bowed to His Excellency. And as he bowed, lo! a look of comprehension spread over the stranger's face. To David also a similar knowledge came. It was none other than Daoud Shah, whom he had last seen at the *campo* of the Begum Somru.

"My Lord," said David, "I ride out now to the Shergarhi, whither I trust you will accompany me."

To which Altamish made no reply, relying on chance to put suitable words into his mouth as the morning wore on, but signified, however, his apparent willingness by ranging himself alongside David, and all the while Yar Khan said not a word, nor showed by any sign what his thoughts were, or even that he saw the Toork at all. Daoud Shah, late Commander-in-Chief of the forces of Her Highness the Begum Somru, fell into the train of horsemen that rode behind the Governor, and found himself alongside Ganesha Singh, who took no notice of him whatever, nor did Daoud Shah know even whether or no David had recognized him. Ganesha Singh he had not noticed in the Begum's camp, and did not recognize now. Not so the lynx-eyed old Rajpoot, who had spotted him from the first.

By now the cavalcade had come on to the Amiran Kādāl, and they might, though they knew it not, come

at any moment on the parties of the faction of Altamish. As the Governor and his escort had come near to the bridge they had found themselves in a part of the town to which Salabat Khan was very dear. Loud had been the lamentations at the rumours of his decease. There were now cheers and shouts and an ominous execrating of the Toork. To the Abbé du Plessis, who had followed in the wake of the horsemen, the import of the sound was old. He had heard the old men talk of it when the Edict of Nantes was revoked. It reminded him of the old chaunt of St. Bartholomew's Eve, that his father had remembered revived at the Revocation. The words ran in his ears, "*Hau Hau Huguenots ! Faites Place aux Papegots !*" The words were different, but there was an angry hum in the air, the hum of an angry crowd that was out for mischief. And the Lord Altamish heard it too, and recognized it, and thanked his stars that things had turned out as they had. Salabat Khan living was a very different matter to tackle to Salabat Khan dead and gone. So that it would be necessary to put a good complexion on the assembly of armed men that were awaiting Altamish on the other side of the river. The mist had by now almost gone, and the sun was shining on the houses that overhung the river-bed, and on the carved plinths that edged the water, stolen from the Pandav temples that lay in ruins up the valley. On the boat-steps and on the plinths and terraces women were now filling earthen jars with water, bathing, washing their coloured scarves, and flooding the whole foreground with warmth and colour that was a pleasant change to those who had ridden the night through in frost and fog. The Lady Miriam looked at David and smiled for a moment through that convenient opening in her veil that she was learning to handle so cunningly. Then her face set somewhat, and she drew her veil sharply

together. They were approaching a row of latticed verandahs where beauty fair and frail held sway. Spangled heads smiled out of the open lattice, and hands waved to the troopers of the escort. The fine figure of the Governor himself always attracted the attention of women, and in quarters such as these, where the attributes of prominent males were eagerly discussed, there were many heads out of their *jilmills* * to see him. In the booths below, the various merchants had opened their stalls for the day, and fruit, tobacco, and grains were being arranged on the steps of the house fronts. Every one was agog to see the Governor whom bazaar gossip last night had reported dead. It was seen, too, that his sister, who was so often about with him, was riding by his side this day.

The sharp eye of Yar Khan had, however, seen some lances and the tips of horses' ears showing over the mud walls of the gardens on the other side of the bridge. Edging his horse alongside to Altamish, he said—

"Those are your men, no doubt, my Lord?"

"My men? Oh, yes! yes! No doubt!"

"You don't seem very certain, my Lord. If His Excellency approves, I will take fifty troopers forward and go and see.—Your Excellency would no doubt desire that I should attack them, if not my Lord Altamish's own following, of which fact he seems doubtful?"

David looked at the place indicated, and then turned to look at Altamish.

"Nay, *Wazir Sahib*, we will all move forward together, my Lord with us. He can then reassure us that they are his own men, and I can order an attack on them at once, if need be."

Altamish by no means relished the situation. However, there was nothing for it but to acquiesce, and trust to events. David then led the party at a smart

* Venetian blinds.

pace over the bridge and up the short steep piece of bazaar on the opposite bank, coming at once to an open space surrounded by walls and gardens. On this were drawn up some two hundred retainers of several Toork chiefs, not more than half, however, of those promised the day before. David decided to take the nettle danger by the hand of action.

"My Lord, these troopers are more than are necessary for my assistance. You will remain with us, but issue orders that these gentlemen leave the city and its suburbs at once. If in an hour's time there are any of them left in the city, they will be at once attacked by my troops. You understand?"

Altamish was fain to admit that he did. By this time the Toork leaders had recognized that it was both Altamish and the Governor himself. With a very distinct feeling of being on a fool's errand, three or four of them rode forward on receiving a summons from Altamish. That astute gentleman had by now recovered his equanimity, and, however much in his heart he might be calling for fire from heaven, he knew well enough that he must dissemble.

"Gentlemen, you will be glad to see with your own eyes that the sad rumours of yesterday are falsified. Our noble Governor is safe and sound. It is not necessary for us to maintain order till the Emperor appoints a successor. His Excellency thanks you for your offered services, and now desires that you at once leave the city and return to your own estates."

After which David could not resist a little sarcasm at Altamish's expense.

"Your assistance is very welcome to me, my Lord. It is well with those in authority when they can rely on such staunch support. I suppose all is well at fort Hari Parbat? I have half a mind to ask you to go and see on my behalf."

The ruddy colour left the olive cheek of Altamish at the reference, but the suggestion appealed to him. Anywhere away from the Shergarhi seemed a haven of rest and safety.

"Your Excellency, it would be well doubtless that I should go and report."

"Ah, well, my Lord, no doubt all is well there; at any rate, we will wait for a bit. I would that you accompany me to the Shergarhi."

Yar Khan sat immobile behind David, and only a gleam in his eye showed that he appreciated the humour of the situation. It was evident that he was content with David's handling of it. Now Yar Khan liked not as a rule playing second fiddle to any man, more especially when that man was of his own erecting. It spoke therefore volumes for David's character that the old soldier statesman should accept him so contentedly, and let him, at any rate for the moment, call the pace.

So, as the Toork gentry filed away, David and his retinue headed for the Shergarhi, which lay some two miles west from the Amiran Kādāl. At his side rode Altamish and Yar Khan, and behind was the Lady Miriam with Ganesha Singh close to her. By them, but a bit wide, rode Daoud Shah, silent but watchful. The unusual sight of a lady a-horseback veiled and on such an occasion, had already attracted his attention; and he took opportunity to study her in profile as they moved to the Shergarhi. That she was a practised horsewoman was evident, and she sat her horse like an Usbeg trooper, as if born to it. The breeze blew the veil close to her face and showed the symmetrical outline. Presently Altamish dropped back to speak to him, and Daoud Shah demanded—

"Who rides on my left? A woman, seemingly?"

"That must be the Lady Miriam, sister of the

Governor, a self-willed woman who is allowed much license. She always accompanies her brother, and has been away now with him over the pass, and was with him at the time of the Rajpoot affray."

"A handsome woman, I warrant."

"No doubt. These Afghanis always are. It is not much use your thinking about that, Khan *Sahib*."

"Why not, since I too am a Duranni of the blood royal? Not that I want to be mixed up with women at the present time."

"I wouldn't much help you if you did. That girl has refused many a good offer of marriage from better men than you, and instead of giving her to the friend that he needed most, her brother laughs and says she shall do as she likes. A fine mother of sons all the same, friend."

"Aye, no doubt, no doubt. You had better go back and talk with that Governor. Keep him in a good temper or you'll be sorry for the morning's work."

The Afghan rode on alone, now and again glancing at Miriam. The story had fired him. He was not wont to be told things were impossible, besides, he did want a wife and that a metalsome one. And the way that Miriam managed her horse inspired him with admiration, as her trim figure did with desire.

CHAPTER XV

THE SHERGARHI

OUTSIDE the Shergarhi they came across the wing of the Regiment of Victory, returning from the Hari Parbat with the two Toork prisoners. Yar Khan had now the Lord Altamish in hand, and as they came abreast the infantry he remarked—

“Did I tell you what had taken place at the Hari Parbat? No? Ah, well, it was like this. We found that the commandant had apparently proclaimed himself as ruler of the place or as governor of the valley. If you would know how he fared, go see the gateway tower there. Some of His Majesty the Emperor’s Goorkha soldiers were murdered in the revolution. We found there two emissaries of whoever was fomenting the disturbances. They are now being brought here for His Excellency’s orders as to their execution.”

And Altamish saw in their midst two of his own Toork retainers, who looked up in his face as their escort marched past him.

“You will see, my Lord, that happily for the sake of peace and order, the Regiment of Victory has returned to its allegiance. His Excellency, however, thought it as well to bring them here, where they would be under sound influence. If I had had my way, I would have shot every man in ten. His Excellency thought otherwise. He will perhaps be glad of your advice as to how to deal with these two prisoners.”

Altamish was getting into a very unpleasant position indeed, and he was faced with the alternatives of sacrificing his own followers, or admitting his own share in the conduct of the commandant of Hari Parbat. It was, perhaps, hardly wise of Yar Khan to press him so hard, unless indeed it was proposed to take extreme measures against him. The policy of the golden bridge must always be at any rate considered. Fortunately, they had arrived at the gate of the Shergarhi, and Yar Khan ceased his goading at the hated Toork.

He rode up to David, and asked what he thought about Altamish.

"If we take him as prisoner we shall have half these Toorks up in arms. We are now apparently safely back in power. I would gladly hack off his foul head, but it were wisest to deny ourselves the satisfaction. I propose that we now give him leave to depart. When His Excellency returns he will decide whether he will take steps against him. So long as he is not in open rebellion against us, it is difficult to act too strongly against him without the Emperor's orders. If we could have had a fight and killed him, it would have saved much trouble."

To which David, whose natural instinct to command had for the time made him forget that he was merely a tenant for a few days in a state he knew little of, could but agree. Not that he had for a moment thought any other course possible, but he was about to propound some such views as his own.

"Very well, *Wazir Sahib*, I agree. I will now give him his leave to go."

Then, turning to the Toork, "My Lord, I shall not trouble you further. I am obliged to you for having turned out with your retainers to enforce order in this my province. You will confer a further favour if you

will inform me of any facts that may come to your notice concerning this extraordinary occurrence at fort Hari Parbat. You now have my permission to leave."

"Sire," returned Altamish, "I see two Toorks as prisoners among your regiment. Would it not be well that I take them with me to find out the reason of their being found in your Excellency's fort under such suspicious circumstances?"

"Nay, my Lord. It is my purpose at present that they remain here. I shall not pass any extreme sentence on them without reference to you, but they will remain in my prison for the present."

"Have I your permission to have speech with them?"

"Surely, my Lord, the permission to depart that I gave you should suffice for your present needs. I would not wish to withdraw it."

The Lord Altamish then saw that the game was up for the present, and wheeled his small party about, saluted surlily, and galloped away down the road. And with him still was Daoud Shah the Afghan.

The Governor's party then filed through the gate of the Shergarhi, where the guard and garrison were drawn up to receive them amid acclamations. Inside the palace yard, the normal routine was in progress. Below the latticed windows of the ladies' quarters in front of the closed gateway, two of the palace guard paced. Astrakhan caps on their heads, their muskets in long baize bags, and a curved knife of terrifying proportions in their belts, the guardians of beauty looked ferocious and dauntless enough.

Outside the durbar room of the commandant of the fort, an elephant weaved happily from foot to foot, the hunting pad on his back gently swaying. Munshis, with their lacquer pen boxes, sat writing for dear life, or hurriedly mended their reed pens. The ordinary

working routine of the government was evidently not paralyzed. In a corner of the first court an armourer was hammering at a shirt of mail, and two saddlers sat mending some camel trappings. Four pieces of artillery of sorts on rather rickety carriages were being cleaned by some lascars, and a couple of mounted troopers were waiting to carry messages. It was, in fact, an everyday scene in an Eastern palace yard. Behind the screens over the inner gate the wives of the Governor watched eagerly for the arrival of their spouse and noted with approval the promptness with which the garrison had got under arms to receive him. Yes, it was undoubtedly their Salabat Khan, safe and sound, thinner perhaps, but that was no doubt due to much travel. They would soon put that right. Let the state cook be sent for. And then and there, while David was dismounting, the Lady Nur Jan had called for that person, and he had appeared at the outer grill to receive very precise orders as to the meals to be prepared for His Excellency.

In the meantime His Excellency was for the moment far more concerned with seeing the Lady Miriam off her horse, than thinking of his wives upstairs. He had actually gone to help her alight—a European courtesy that that young lady was not slow to notice. The eventful night and day had left her fairly weary, lithe and elastic though she was, and for the moment she was divided between an intense desire to rest on the soft velvet cushions of her own apartment, and an unaccountable instinctive wish to remain with David. She had watched him closely through his somewhat anxious day, and had noted appreciatively his steady, determined bearing, and had taken a pride in his success in the rôle which she had been the first to suggest. She had noticed, too, with amusement that Yar Khan had almost cheerfully accepted the

second place when David had chosen to direct the proceedings.

We may therefore well imagine that when David had handed her from her horse, the elusive veil had come apart again at the right moment, and David was once more able to look into those bright eyes that now undoubtedly flashed approval. Time, however, fingers on his rosary. One kindly look and her ladyship had disappeared into the ladies' apartments, while the escort had looked on stolidly, but with inward wonder at the way in which His Excellency treated his unconventional sister.

Yar Khan then collected a few chosen guards around him and escorted David to his quarters. Fortunately, the quarters, the dwelling and business rooms in an Eastern mansion, are well away from the ladies' apartments, and there was no chance of anxious wives bursting in on the master when engaged in business or at rest. But since there had been wild rumours in the air that morning, it was important to send a message over to the ladies with due ceremony. It had, of course, been also arranged that Miriam should make a suitable statement. Yar Khan himself, as soon as David had sat down to a meal in Salabat Khan's private apartments, had gone off to see the official charged with communicating with His Excellency's ladies' attendants, and delivering a message to say that His Excellency sent all greetings of courtesy and respect, but was immensely fatigued with a long ride, which the Lady Miriam would describe, and after a rest would have to attend to very pressing affairs of state.

"That," Yar Khan told David, "will keep them quiet for some time to come, and an attack of fever will be the most natural sequence to a long day's travel."

But the problem before the *Wazir* was an anxious

one. True, all the first moves had been more successful than he could have hoped for. The attempt to overturn the government had failed and been thwarted with far greater ease than he dared have looked for. But several far greater dangers were really ahead. The imposture of Ferassa *Sahib* could not go on for long. They had as yet no news as to how Salabat Khan's wound progressed, or what he would eventually order, when the news of the situation had reached him. He had not yet been told, of course, of the David imposture. It would be necessary to tell him carefully. Eastern minds are suspicious, and Yar Khan was anxious that the step they had taken on the spur of the moment should not be misunderstood. Happily the Lady Miriam was there to vouch for the purity of their motives, nay, better, to explain that she herself had proposed the course.

So musing, Yar Khan left David to rest, saying that he would come to him in the afternoon, and that he had given orders to the guard that no one was to be admitted.

The hard old man had no need for rest himself. A few mouthfuls of *kababs* and rice, with some sweet tea in a samovar, restored him to full vigour, and he at once started to see the commandant of the palace guard. It was essential that nothing of a *contretemps* should happen. Full military precautions against any unexpected move of Altamish must be taken unostentatiously. Then he must see Ganesha Singh, and know that David's men were well cared for, and their horses properly stabled and fed. Ganesha Singh had better go and see his master later, orders to the guard had been given to admit him. The detachment from the Regiment of Victory had to be properly sandwiched in among people who would keep them out of mischief and stimulate their loyalty. There were few details

that that wise old head ever forgot. A considerable affection had sprung up in his heart for David, and as Miriam had noticed, he seemed unaccountably to acquiesce in being led by the young soldier—a very new trait in his character to be led by any one, even the master he served. But the phenomenon was but the phenomenon of India, where white blood even far more dilute than that which ran in David's veins, automatically demands obedience.

By three in the afternoon a considerable number of the officials of the province had arrived to make the customary *salaam* to the Governor. This, however, Yar Khan would not hear of; His Excellency was far too tired to receive any one save perhaps the head of the police. He himself, however, would hear any reports necessary, and convey the greetings to His Excellency. To admit the head of the police would, however, be good policy. Yar Khan went off to prepare David and his chamber. The room was to be darkened, and David was to have an attack of fever that kept him from doing more than hear one or two urgent reports.

The chief of the police entered, made his reverence, and then sat down. Thanks to Salabat Khan's Persian reputation, David's was able to pass muster, and the few sentences of Pushtoo he used were beyond reproach. It was his mother's tongue. The chief of the police, or *kotwal*, was an important functionary, concerned with many varied duties and inquisitions. He had heard, after His Excellency had put things right, of the trouble at Hari Parbat. He had hoped to have found something from the Begum Allah Visayah, no doubt His Excellency knew the name and would forgive mentioning her. She had, however, left the city the day before. Then there had been two recent arrivals. One a curious,

secretive person, an Afghan with a small retinue, who had come in they said by Muzzafarnagar, and up the Jhelum Gorge route from Domel. There had also come an *Angrez*. What sort of an *Angrez* he had not yet found out, but he had a riding pony, and a servant who rode a pack mule. He wore some sort of uniform and had red hair, no one had interfered with him, but police agents were watching him. He was stopping at the Bibigunj *serai* (travellers' hostel).

Yar Khan, who was present, did most of the questioning, and then desired the chief of the police to report whence the rumour of His Excellency's death had started, and also to watch closely and report all movements of the Lord Altamish. David then wearily gave him leave to withdraw, and ordered a good report of his health to be circulated. Yar Khan breathed again. It had been quite a normal interview, and quite natural. No one could suspect anything. Of course, now that Altamish had been scotched, Yar Khan himself could have carried on government once the public believed that Salabat Khan was not killed, but they were already committed to His Excellency's presence at the palace. The statement of the chief of police that he had conversed with His Excellency would now carry them well on for say at least forty-eight hours. But Yar Khan had counted without the eternal feminine. His life had left him void of that important understanding, which is a fifth sense worth most of the others put together.

The gentle lady Nur Jan, had sent a message begging that she might come and attend her tired lord, and when told that he must rest and then do urgent business, had contented herself with sending a wifely message and a tisanne made with her own fair hands. The Alana Bibi, however, was made of more tiresome stuff. The Lady Miriam's story of trouble and danger, and the

night ride through the frost and fog, and the fight at Hari Parbat, with the march through the town, had angered her.

"Hoighty toighty ! Pretty fine games for a chit of a girl like you to be about in ; dignified, too, for an Afghan lady ! I shall go to my lord at once, and make him tell me his affairs of state, and not you !"

So then and there my lady had collected a few of her maids, called for her chamberlain, donned her veil, and ordered it to be announced that she was approaching His Excellency's apartments, and must speak with him at once.

To Yar Khan's horror, then, as he came back from passing out the chief of police, there, in the outer room of David's quarters he found her. A very few words convinced him that she must be told. She was out for trouble, and would not be denied. Yar Khan luckily hit at once on the only antidote. The Lady Miriam must come forthwith, sleep or no sleep. He conducted the Bibi into a side chamber with suitable cushions, said that His Excellency would receive her immediately, and sent an urgent summons to Miriam to join the Bibi Alana at the Governor's quarters. Miriam at once realized that trouble was imminent, and hurried into her veil to follow through the same secluded route as the Bibi had taken.

David had had his rest, and after the police official had withdrawn, was pacing up and down his room, turning over the situation in his mind. To him thus came Yar Khan to announce that he must receive the lady, and that she must be taken into their confidence.

"The Lady Miriam will, I hope, be here immediately. I have sent for her urgently."

"You must stay with me, *Wazir Sahib* ; this is more than I bargained for."

"I think, *Ferassa Sahib*, that it will be better to

begin with, that you receive the ladies alone. I will be at hand if you call me. If I am here before the lady is told anything she will be furious at such a breach of etiquette. Later she will have other matters to think of."

So for full five minutes they waited, and then another five, but no sign of the Lady Miriam, and the *Wazir*, knowing the Bibi's character, said—

"I think that there will be less harm if you see the lady alone, and if you make out that you have fever and cannot rise. Ask her to sit by you on the cushions, and then tell her the story. In the meantime the Lady Miriam will be here and come in to corroborate your good faith."

So saying, Yar Khan left the perturbed David, and in a couple of minutes the Bibi entered. According to the etiquette of the lady and her position she was fully veiled, a handsome, well-shaped woman, graceful and stately withal. She was the mother of the only sons of Salabat Khan, and carried herself accordingly.

Yar Khan had told her that His Excellency had an attack of fever. She entered David's room with a rustle of silk and an aroma of musk.

"I trust my lord is well?"

"Bibi *Sahiba*, I am much fatigued, and have fever. I trust that you and your sons enjoy perfect health."

"By my lord's favour we do. I much regret your lordship's indisposition. I fear you have much overtaxed your strength. The Lady Miriam has been urging you to great fatigue."

"Not so, Bibi *Sahiba*. Come now, I have much to tell you. You will hear how weak I am, and how different my voice is from that you know."

"That is so, my lord, and I am much concerned."

Alana was mollified at the proposal to confide in her,

and drew near to where David lay in rugs, and seated herself on cushions near his head.

"Now, listen, Bibi *Sahiba*, and be not stirred till I have finished my tale and you have seen again the Lady Miriam and heard Yar Khan too. Know that His Excellency Salabat Khan has been in great peril. Nay, do not be frightened—listen, and listen very calmly, I implore you. His Excellency was attacked by Rajpoots three days ago beyond Baram-galla, and is now lying wounded at the castle of the Chib Chief Lal Khan."

"My lord, I do not understand. What do you mean? Are you wounded?"

"Lady—I am not Salabat Khan."

The Bibi rose with a scream. "Treachery! treachery!"

"Be calm, I implore you. No harm is intended, no treachery."

At this moment in came Yar Khan and Miriam.

The Bibi had left her seat on the cushions and rushed towards them.

"What on earth," she demanded, "does all this mean?"

But the sight of Miriam and Yar Khan to all purposes unmoved, at any rate induced her to listen, while they explained to her the whole story. How the Governor; being unfit to travel, had sent them on, and how they heard at Aliabad *Serai* that Altamish was spreading a rumour of Salabat Khan's death, and was about to usurp the governorship. Then how, as it was impossible to say when His Excellency would be fit to travel, it had been decided by Miriam and Yar Khan to avail themselves of a resemblance of the young captain to the Governor in making the people believe that Salabat Khan was alive at the head of his government. How they had then and there acted on the idea, recovered

Hari Parbat, before even Altamish had known that his plans had been successful there, and had then brought their ruler in triumph through the streets, with his sister as usual at his side. How the populace had been given full proof that the rumour was a lie, how the Toork chiefs had dispersed with their retinue, and how at any rate for a short time all was well. It would be essential that Ferassa *Sahib* should carry on his rôle for the present. It was, of course, impossible to tell many. A secret soon ceased to be a secret. Yar Khan and Miriam had, however, both recognized that she, as the mother of the Governor's sons, must of course be told, and not be put off with tales of fever and fatigue, and it was to tell her all this that they had been about to crave a private audience. It would be well not to tell the lady Nur Jan as yet.

The Bibi, mollified, listened in silence. If the lady Nur Jan was not to know she could pretend that she alone had been preferred by His Excellency on his return. That would be one to her. Besides, the whole story appealed to her love of intrigue and excitement. Yes, and also without doubt this young man was very personable, very personable. Afghan married ladies do not have many chances of seeing strange men; young or old.

"What," she now demanded—"what is the next move?"

"We await some news of His Excellency. We expect orders."

"Very well. I quite understand. You have done wisely. I will now converse with this gentleman. You have my leave to withdraw to your apartments; Miriam."

Miriam could not restrain a grin of amusement at Yar Khan, as she withdrew. As a matter of fact, Alana was behaving magnificently. The touch as to

telling her and not Nur Jan had put her in the best of humours. Her apparent intention to enjoy the irregularity of confidential intercourse with a strange man had its humorous side, even Yar Khan saw this. He even accentuated the situation by withdrawing himself for a few minutes so as to attend to any other affairs that might need him outside.

David, who was growing more accustomed to female society, without more ado asked Alana to resume her seat, and had just commenced a more detailed account of the fight at Thana-mandi and his opportune arrival, when Yar Khan returned.

"A messenger has arrived from His Excellency."

CHAPTER XVI

TOORK, AFGHAN, AND FRANK

ALTAMISH and his followers, with Daoud Shah the mysterious, cantered on from the Shergarhi till they were out of musket shot—it is as well to do that if you must turn your back on an armed adversary—and then the Toork pulled up. Slowly and bitterly he shook his fist at the mud bastions of the Shergarhi. “God smite their souls to the nethermost hell!” And Daoud Shah the Afghan laughed—a sarcastic, derisive, insidious chuckle that made Altamish turn sharp on him. It was just such a laugh as devils laugh when men fall.

“You laugh! You dare to laugh at me! You infernal snivelling Afghan of foul extraction. You——”

“Nay, stay, my Lord, lest you say what is not easily forgotten. Nay, but I will take my vengeance on you now. What think you has become of His Excellency, Salabat Khan?”

“How the foul fiend should I know? He was well enough when he sent us to the right about just now like whipped hounds. We Toorks little like to be made fools of.”

“Whether you like it or whether you don’t, you have been made very handsome fools of, more so too than you think.”

“Explain, lest I have you——”

"Enough! enough, or I tell you some more of those secrets you wot of. Who, for instance, was beneath the Diwan-i-Khas at Delhi the night the Moghul Emperor's eyes were put out?"

"Nay, *Sirdar Sahib*, that were pure imagination on your part. Nay, bear with me. Tell me what mean you in this mystery?"

"Why, I mean, oh blind man! that the *Sirdar Salabat Khan* is not in Srinagar, nor has been these nine days. That was not His Excellency the Governor who rode with you from the Amiran Kādāl."

"What do you mean, in the Prophet's name?"

"I mean what I say, the Governor was not there to-day, and the story that reached you of this wound was a true one."

"Who is the man?"

"Ah, that is my secret."

"But the Lady Miriam, his sister, was with him. She often rides with him. You saw that all the people knew her."

"True, and thus helped to impose on you. The fact remains."

"If he holds a durbar, we will go and denounce him. Am I to disbelieve my own eyes?"

"Just as you like, but mark what I have told you. You have been duped, badly taken in, by very clever people. That old man Yar Khan is the moving spirit, and evidently that sister of the Governor's is in it too. They have deliberately put up a puppet to prevent the people declaring in your favour."

Altamish cursed low and fierce, and broke again into a canter, and rode straight through the city, looking neither to the right nor to the left. The children and the chickens and the beggars fled from under his horse's feet, and men looked up and wondered, and the women grounded their water jars to look and marvel. Close

to the mosque of Shah Hamadan the Abbé was visiting a patient with cataract, and paused to see who clattered by, surely there had been enough that morning of retinues in city streets ! And he saw the fierce hatred in the face of Altamish and the evil countenance of Daoud Shah, and the memory of the face of Fouquier Tinquerville struck him as an evil dream. At the door of the Bibigunj *Serai* stood the European whose presence the chief of the police had reported to David, and he too saw them pass, and the evil face of Daoud Shah was the one that struck his fancy. "Holy Moses ! 'Tis a Hebrew Jew ! Tear and Ages !" And crossed himself like the very proper Catholic he was.

Through the city and out to the gardens of the suburbs rode Altamish, never drawing rein till he came to his own house and garden on the shores of the Dhall Lake. Since the party of the day before, a wind had blown and scattered the leaves of last year, and the dead branches of the trees over the garden paths. Altamish was moved to wrath, and he called for his garden sweeper. Instead, however, a woman drew forth, and salaamed.

"Who are you ?" he shouted.

"Sire, I am the sweeper's wife."

"Why the devil are not the garden paths swept ?"

"Sire, my husband lies in his hut with bad fever and ague. I am doing his work, but, as your honour sees, I am many months gone with child, and I work but slowly."

Whereon Altamish commanded that they throw her down and beat her with rods, which was done forthwith, so that she died that night. But there is no limit to the fury of a Toork.

After which the mad rage of Altamish cooled for the time, and he and Daoud Shah took counsel one with

another, and Wali Dad, the plotter who failed, had an exceeding bad quarter of an hour. Nature, however, had provided him with the long spoon that he who sups with the devil needs must have. Wali Dad was able to exonerate himself from the failure of the night before, and to show that not only had the Begum Allah Visayah carried out her compact, but that at dawn that morning the fort of Hari Parbat was in the hands of the Toork party, and would have remained so had not the Governor Salabat Khan with Yar Khan, the old fox, appeared there shortly after, gained admittance, and hanged the commandant over his own gateway.

Altamish now heard the full tale of what had happened at the fort, and even began to realize how extremely fortunate he was to be free himself and back on his own domain. Food and rest were at any rate the first need, and Altamish and Daoud Shah soon sat down to a repast. That over, the Toork sat himself down to smoke and drowse, while the latter, like the restless soul he was, preferred to pace up and down in the garden by the edge of the lake.

While his ally slept, Daoud Shah, the wandering Afghan of evil memories and weird associations, paced by himself, his eager brain plotting as had ever been the case, some evil to thwart such good as men would find room for in their daily undertakings. The man's memory dwelt lovingly on all the evil he had seen in the past, of which now and again he had let the world see a glimpse. It was a foul cruel memory, and it stretched back far into the evil time afore. But the immediate business to plan was how to help Altamish plunge that fair valley into war and misery, and incidentally ruin that young *sahib* who had made the Afghan seem a fool that morning in the Begum Somru's *campo*. The line to take seemed clear enough. First the number of the Toorks' supporters in the valley must

be increased in every way possible, then some attack by folk beyond the borders would leave some opportunity for a Toork rising to be successful. The wild folk on the borders of Kashmir were considerable. In the north were the Chinese and Tibetans, on the east the tribes of Baltistan and the districts bordering on Gilgit. But in the west there were the actual tribal unsubdued districts of the Indus uplands, where the wildest of Afghans and similar peoples lay always eager for war and rapine. If only they could be stirred up, there would be ample opportunity or trouble—the tribes from the Black Mountain, from the Hazarajat, and the Khagan Valley from Tangir and Darel and Chilas. And a grim smile came over the face of the schemer at the mere thought of all the evil it might be possible to engender and all the rue that lay a-waiting for Salabat Khan, Governor, and Ferassa *Sahib*, his friend. "By the hundred names of God," swore Daoud Shah, into whose calculations the deity came seldom enough—"by the hundred names of God, we shall make it hot for them." And the cold wind from the mountain-tops whistled shrill through the poplars, and memories of the evil he had had a hand in came back as pure joy to that heart, the busy eternal mocker of good in the world. How red had run Jerusalem before the Eagles entered, how red had run the streets of Paris a few years ago. How had the Toorks of the Golden Horde sacked the city of Constantine! and Nadir Shah the Persian ripped the life and wealth from Delhi! All good memories for the evil mind and soul of Daoud Shah of the Ben-i-Israel whom some men said was the foul Mahound himself.

Then, when the Afghan had walked and planned and plotted for full two hours, Altamish was awake, and Daoud Shah went in to him to tell his plans, or as much of them as might be profitable. And within, Altamish

lay on cushions, and beside him twanging gently a guitar sat the dancer Azizun, who laughed when the Afghan entered, so that he demanded gruffly enough why she laughed. Whereat that lady remarked pertly that she laughed because she saw that he had come to talk affairs of state, and because she also knew that the Lord Altamish had not the least intention of doing anything else but listen to her for at least another hour, and perhaps two. She had just prepared the very sweetest rose-water *huga* that man could dream of for him, and further, if Daoud Shah was not too grumpy, why she would prepare one for him also. Then, since Paris speaks not with Menelaus when Helen sits at his feet, Daoud Shah was fain also to accept the *huga*, and was fitted out with a separate alcove and set of cushions and one of Azizun's girls to amuse him. Now, beauty and grace in due season were agreeable enough to Daoud Shah, and since it was obviously no time to get Altamish to talk sense, he was content to dally with Delilah in the next alcove, and to smoke and drowse while the lady played soft music. To do him justice, it was a part which he could play well enough if need be, and it was late in the afternoon before it was in the least necessary to insist on talking business with Altamish. After a while Azizun came in quietly to the alcove where Lalun was singing softly to the Afghan, who pulled at his *huga* peaceably, and said—

"Lalun, the Lord Altamish would speak with thee anent the new zithers you want. I will entertain this *Sirdar*." And Lalun slipped away.

"I fear, my Lord, my girl has bored you. You are not used to our simple Kashmir dancers."

Daoud Shah was not in the mood to trifle, and removed not the nargille from his lips.

"Perhaps Azizun herself should have come to him."

The cleft in the Afghan forehead deepened. "See here, Azizun. I am well pleased with you and your far-famed girls and their dancing. I heard tell of it from Balkh to Kandahar, and now I want your help. Who is the lady that rides with His Excellency whom I saw in the city?"

"That, my Lord, is the Governor's sister, the Lady Miriam."

"Ha! so I have heard. Well, I propose to marry that lady, and it will be for you to assist me."

"I know not that I care to do anything of the sort."

"Perhaps you do not know that what Daoud Shah wills in this world is generally done. I shall make it worth your while to help me."

"Perhaps you do not know that I do as I please in things save what the Lord Altamish wishes, and no man bids me do his bidding."

"Ah! I must talk to you of the past. I am best when kept in with. What was that story of Ghuzni and the Kuzilbash's garden? Something about his son and a fig-tree, if I remember right."

Azizun was perturbed. "Well, what of it?"

"Oh, nothing. I mention it to show you that I am no new traveller in this tortuous path. I am worth pleasing and serving, and this Altamish will tell you so."

Azizun bit her lip, and thought better of it. It is ill to quarrel with a man till you can gauge his calibre.

"Such help as I can give my Lord I will give."

"Ah, that is better; but enough, see, here comes Lalun again."

Azizun returned to her lord, and the afternoon passed away. The sun had set behind the Pir Panjal before she and Lalun quietly withdrew and left the two worthies to their plotting, with their scented breath but a memory. Altamish was ready and keen enough

to talk business; and Daoud Shah entered on his plan for raising real trouble in the Happy Valley. He also announced that among his share of success would be Miriam to wife. "Take her, and welcome," said the other. "And I wish you joy o' her. You'll find her need some taming." And then continued their planning.

Daoud Shah, it was proposed, would himself go over into Tangir and Darel, and from thence into the Khagan, and perhaps to the Black Mountain. The Sayads of Khagan would probably be stirred up against the Afghan proper. Altamish must send agents too, up the Gilgit road to tell of the plans to raise more revenue for next year. There might be some hint too of a coming levy of girls to be sent to the Emperor at Kabul, that would always stir hatred, not so much for the sake of the girls as that a levy meant that the fair price would not be paid. Daoud Shah felt sure that a well worked incursion of the tribes into Kanzilwan and the Gurais valley, or into the Lolab, would bring the Governor with the flower of his troops to expel the intruders. If they were strong and well handled, the troops might be separated and cut off, and thus give plenty of occupation to the troops while Altamish and his friends engineered a rising in the valley. It really sounded quite promising, and while the two plotters continued their dreams their agents were already at work throughout the valley.

After a few minutes' further discussion of their projects, Daoud Shah announced his intention of going to the city to arrange to despatch some agents ahead of him to the tribal country, and leaving Altamish to his *huga* and cushions, started forth a-horseback towards Srinagar.

As he reached one of the poplar avenues outside the town he became aware of a tall white figure striding

along in front of him. From the small white cap on the head he saw that it must be that Christian priest of whose presence in the valley he was aware. Spurring his horse, he was soon able to overtake the stranger, pulling up the animal to a walk, and uttering the Muhammadan greeting, "Peace be with all," to which the Abbé, as he turned to see who had accosted him, replied simply enough, "And with you too," and then gazed intently into the Afghan's face. A curious sight he must have found it, the furrowed, sinister hawk-nosed face with the deep furrows and a thousand lesser ones radiating therefrom. The Afghan found the gaze a little disconcerting. He was accustomed to scan searchingly the features of others, not to have his own taken stock of so seriously.

"You, sir, will perhaps know me again," said he at last.

"Your pardon," said the Abbé, rousing himself from a reverie. "Your pardon a thousand times. Your face struck a chord in my memory, and I forgot my manners."

"You have, I believe, been long in Kashmir?"

"Well, I am certainly not recently arrived."

"You are not, I understand, in the Company's service?"

"I am in the service of My Master, the Son of the God of the Christians."

"Ah! the God of the Nazarenes."

"Yes, if you will it so. The Great God of the Nazarenes, whom all the world acknowledges, whether they know it or no."

"I do not acknowledge him."

"No." People who knew the Abbé would recognize that he was slightly ruffled. It did not please him to have his Church and the Christian religion spoken of as the "Nazarenes."

But Daoud Shah had been looking at the priest steadily in his turn, and suddenly said—

“Now I remember where we met.”

“I did not know I had had the pleasure.”

“Oh yes, we did; but never mind. Tell me of the Nazarene whom you worship.”

“My friend, what need is there for me to waste such news on the follower of the son of a Christian slave girl, born six hundred years and more later than Him whom ye call the Nazarene?”

“Ah, *Padre Sahib*, you need not think that I worry about him whom his followers call the Prophet. I come of an older religion than that. Not that I despise the Prophet or Him whom you follow, for the matter of that. Oh yes; I remember once He stood by where some men were looking at a dead pariah, that lay with its glassy eyes covered in dust, and the skin shrivelled back from its teeth. ‘Look at its ragged paws!’ said one. ‘Faugh! what a brute,’ said another. ‘See!’ cried a third, ‘its draggled tail.’ ‘See its mangy skin,’ said a fourth. And then your Nazarene said, ‘Yes, and see its teeth like pearls.’ He was, I think, the carpenter’s son.”

The Abbé looked and stared. “What are you saying? You say you saw the Son of Man?”

“Well, did I? Perhaps I am mistaken. You think I know nothing of the Christian religion and their Bible. I know many things. I know, for instance, that you are French.”

“How do you know I am French? I care not if you do know that. It can be little enough that a Muhammedan like you knows of the Christian Bible.”

“*Padre*,” said the Afghan, “I have seen and know many things. Look, do you remember this?” And here he made a sign.

The Abbé crossed himself. “What do you know

of the Hundredth Name of God or of a prince and ruler in Israel ? ”

“ I told you, *Padre Sahib*, that I know many things. I that saw the Eagles march over the walls of Jerusalem. You ask how I know that you are French, and what I know of your Bible. Listen to it in French—

Il est écrit

Avant que la corde d'argent se rompe

Que la lampe d'or se brise

Que la cruche casse sur la fontaine

Et que la roue casse au puits

Avant que la poussière retourne à la terre

D'où elle a été tiré. ...

And as he listened the Abbé remembered a secret scene in his youth in which he had had share, and apart from that, the pleasure that that last and most beautiful chapter of Ecclesiastes had always brought him. “ *Jeune homme, rejouis toi dans ta jeunesse. . . . Ah !* a long, long, weary while ago. How did this Afghan come to know it in French of all tongues or any other of the glimpses of old forgotten things, or the Hundredth Name of God ? And as he marvelled he noticed that the rider and horse were farther away and the voice came in a mocking tone.

“ How do I know that you are French ? Because I saw you in Paris in a tumbril with Marie Marquise de Bourbel St. Stephanie.”

“ *Ciel !* ” quoth the Abbé, and there came to him the memory of one in the crowd who mocked at the crucifix he had held before the Marquise's brave eyes as she went to the guillotine. Then there came to him also a memory of that dark story of the Middle Ages, of Ahasuerus who had similarly mocked the Christ as he carried the Cross, and been bidden to wander the world through till the Second Coming, taking part in all the evil of the universe. With the old story was

that evil rumour of the blood ritual with which the Jews were said to purge their sin in the blood of Christian children. *Le Juif Errant!* It would account for the knowledge of the Scriptures, and the apochryphal story of the pariah. Nay, it would account for that secret knowledge of the building of the second temple. An Afghan of the *Ben-i-Israel*, it was like enough too. The Wandering Jew waiting for the second coming had, he knew, been last heard of at Hamburg, in 1794, *Erwige Jude!* A strange story, and Jean Armande du Plessis, greatly mystified, strode on down the poplar avenue to the mosque Shah Hamadan, near which his quiet abode lay, hard by that putative tomb of Christ which men show to this day in Kashmir. Outside it lay an old burial ground of Islam, "*où la poussière retourne à la terre.*"

CHAPTER XVII

THE RETURN OF SALABAT KHAN

THE message that had arrived from Salabat Khan promised to clear up the situation. It was to the effect that he had received Yar Khan's letter regarding the reported plot of Altamish, and that as his wound was not so bad as he had expected, he would be at Aliabad *Serai* in a litter the following evening with an escort of Chib retainers belonging to his relative. He would expect Yar Khan to send a party to meet him, if possible under the young captain whom he had engaged.

Yar Khan at once returned to David's apartments and relieved that young man of the Bibi Alana's searching questions. It would be necessary to rest the horses and men that night, and start the next morning when the sun was up. A fresh litter could be provided from Shapiyon, and, if necessary, His Excellency could then be brought straight in. The Bibi Alana professed herself satisfied, and after a suitable exchange of courtesies withdrew to her own apartments. When she was gone Yar Khan heaved a sigh of relief, for the presence of a petticoat was ever an anxiety. But the evening was drawing in, and even his iron frame craved for a rest. So since all was apparently quiet within the province, and the palace guards fresh and alert the weary folk from the other side of the passes slept.

It was not therefore till the next morning that Yar

Khan would hear of making plans to give effect to His Excellency's message. But the next morning betimes, both David and the *Wazir* were astir.

The arrangements that seemed to be necessary were simple enough. David would have to ride out from the Shergarhi as Salabat Khan, and the following morning the real Salabat Khan would come in accompanied by the real David clothed in his own dress, who had been, it was said, back to Chib-land from Aliabad *Serai* at the time the news had come of the plans and machinations of Altamish. It was only to be expected that he would return with the Governor, and the men of his own troop who had escorted him so steadfastly through the city were still believing their captain actually to be away with Salabat Khan. It only remained therefore to make it so. To this end Yar Khan proposed that David should ride forth as His Excellency at about noon that afternoon, and make straight for Aliabad *Serai*. Yar Khan would, of course, accompany him. It was necessary that *he* should explain to Salabat Khan what the situation was, and how David had saved the province.

The next move was to consider what strength of escort should go with them. David voted against his own men going; there was no use in running more risk of detection than was necessary. No, the remainder of Habib Khan's bodyguard had better go, there would be forty sabres, and that should be enough. "We had better let the Lady Miriam know," said David, who seemed to feel that something was wanting in the atmosphere.

"We had better let the Bibi Alana know too, then, she must now be told exactly how we are going to act," said Yar Khan. "It will be as well really to summon them to His Excellency's presence. The Lady Miriam will understand, and Alana too, and not be offended."

have also ventured to summon the Lady Miriam, and now you can both hear. His Excellency, as we informed you last night, has written that he has made effort to travel, and will be at Aliabad *Serai* this afternoon with a Chib escort. I leave shortly with this gentleman to meet him. The *Sahib* will ride out as Governor and return as his captain of horse. He would like you to say that he has done his duty as his Excellency's double with courage and decorum."

And the Bibi Alana bowed her head and said, "*Wazir Sahib*, and young English sir, whose name I do not yet know, the Lady Miriam and I certify that you have done your duty well and honourably, and have rendered His Excellency and his family great service."

Hereon, David, who felt himself much more competent to face two women rather than one disconcerting one, remembered how the Begum Somru had expressed curiosity at the English manner of salute, and said—

"Ladies, I am your very humble servant, and trust I may long remain in your service, and that of His Excellency. Permit me to salute you after the manner of the English." Whereon he raised first Alana's fair plump hand and kissed it, and then the beautiful tapering fingers of Miriam, whereat she drew her veil the closer, and the ladies withdrew. It has been said that David was a comely and attractive young man.

Yar Khan had stood and watched, and his wrinkled eyelids blinked, but he said nothing.

Then when the ladies had gone, he put his hand on David's shoulder in kindly fashion and said—

"Boy, the horses and the troopers are ready."

So David clattered out of the palace gates, after having been for six and thirty hours Governor of the Province of Kashmir in the Empire of the Durannis.

It was a bright, clear day, and the road across the plateaus or *karewas* was more than beautiful, and the great range of the Pir Panjal stood like a whitewashed wall in the midday sun a stone's throwaway. But it took five hours' steady riding and climbing for that stone to touch land, and it was not till the late afternoon, when all the Eastern slopes were deep in shadow and the paths frozen again, that they reached Aliabad *Serai*. There they found that Salabat Khan had arrived in a litter with thirty *non-de-script* troopers from his relatives' estate, and had been resting in the quarter for the last hour.

Yar Khan lost no time in going in and describing to the Governor the situation in sufficient length and in such guise as would reassure him. Salabat Khan was startled to find how nearly his government had been supplanted, though he was well aware of the deep-rooted hostility of the Toork faction.

"That thrice misbegotten Altamish was at the bottom of it? I don't doubt it, I don't doubt it. He was ever faithless and intriguing. You and I know how he served the Emperor of the Moguls, that blind wretch. We also, I fancy, know who blinded him. Wali Dad that secretary of his, I know too. A slimy son of a dog if ever there was one. And they tried to kill my Goorkhas? You hanged the rebel *Kommadan* of the Regiment of Victory. Who ordered it? The young Frank did. Upon my soul that was well done. God smite their souls to the nethermost hell! Was Feroz Tuglag in it?"

"So I am told."

"And Ali Khan Toork?" The *Wazir* nodded.

"And Sabuktagin Gori and his brothers?"

"They were all in it, also, likewise Murad Beg."

"Oh, the Moguls, too, eh? Well, I might have guessed that. The Moguls have always hated us

Pathans, curse them! Perhaps they've had good reason, but they ousted us from the Delhi thrones first. You say that, except at the Hari Parbat, you had no bloodshed. How was that?"

"We found the whole of the Toork party drawn up at the Amiran Kādāl Bridge as we rode down from the Hari Parbat. The young Frank made a bold advance, and the *sirdars* were afraid, and thought you had returned. Altamish rode up, and said he had come to welcome you, having heard that you had been hurt in Poonch. We judged best not to attack them as they did not begin. They have a strong party at Kabul, and we had little open evidence of their complicity. You should have seen Altamish's face when he thought it was you who rode up to him."

"I see, I see. It was well done—well done by all of you, and this young captain of horse seems the very man I have long looked for. With him and you by my side, old friend, we ought to be a match for them. Call him in."

David had changed his head-dress during the ride, and without that his likeness was not so striking. He rode into Aliabad *Serai*, therefore, without attracting attention from the Governor's new escort. Yar Khan had halted the troopers who had accompanied them, outside the *serai*, and this had given David time to change into his ordinary dress as a captain of horse. It had all passed off simply enough.

Salabat Khan received him with great heartiness.

"I have just heard from my *Wazir*, Ferassa *Sahib*, of the plots of these sons of burnt fathers, and of your conduct. Apart from the services you have rendered me, you have shown great wisdom, and I am glad to have you in my service, to help me confound these conspiracies. I have tried hard, *Sahib*, to govern this country well, with one law for the weak and the same

for the strong. I read history, *Sahib*, and I know how the Emperor Akbar ruled. Now and again men come who tell me how the English rule, and how wealth and content accrue. The nobles in this valley have resisted me, and I have tamed them ; but they hate me and try to do me evil. Had I allowed them to grind their estates, we should have an unhappy poverty-stricken valley, and contented nobles, so far as these Toorks and Moguls can ever be content. Not that I let these Kashmir peasantry do all they would like. An insolent idle lot, if you treat them over generously. I try to keep the mean, Ferassa *Sahib*, and at times I weary of it. Yar Khan here helps me with all his might, but he would flay men alive oftener to save trouble. How do the English manage ? ”

“ It is rather a long story, Your Excellency, and they too have their troubles.”

“ Well, well ! You must tell me more of it at leisure. Glory is for all, and heaven for those who bleed. It is as holy to try and govern well as to fight for God and His Prophet. Did not the old Moolah, who came from Baramullah, say that, Yar Khan ? ”

“ He did, Your Excellency, and he and that old Frank priest who was visiting you at the same time agreed on that. That was in the last cholera year.”

The immediate question, however, was whether or no they should push on at once with fresh bearers, who had already been collected or remain at the *serai* for the night.

“ I doubt if Your Excellency is fit to move, or travel further.”

“ Man ! My Excellency will suffer much more cooped up here when that Toork party are at their mischief in Srinagar ! A litter’s as good as a bed. Let us start immediately, *Sirdars* ! Do my Chib retainers come on with me to the Holy City ? ”

"*Jo hukm, Khudawand!*" murmured the grizzled old Chib chieftain in charge of the clansmen. "Whatever the Lord may order."

"To Srinagar then forthwith. It will be well to arrive by night, so that Altamish shall not know that I am in a litter."

The move down from the pass was uneventful, and it was not long after midnight that Salabat Khan was let in by Ganesha Singh, who was in charge of the main gate of the Shergarhi, and quietly carried to his apartments.

To Ganesha Singh's great satisfaction, too, there was his Ferassa *Sahib* wearing his yellow clothes and his dragon helmet, so that all anxieties and parrying of his men's questions was over. The faithful old Rajpoot ran to kneel and put his arms round his *sahib's* ankles after the manner of the East, as if the Governor behind whom he had been riding these last two days had not been the same man. It was to his squadron leader that he tendered the welcome, and the warmth of his greeting had its use in confirming the men in their belief that David had been absent.

"Is all well with my *Rissalah*, Ganesha Singh?"

"Your Honour, all is well, by the favour of your presence."

"Good! All is well with His Excellency, I hear, and that the men have behaved well and done me credit. It is well, tell them I am pleased." And then dropping the fiction as they drew apart from the guard, "Is all well, old soldier, in the palace? What of the Lady Miriam?"

"All is well, your honour. The lady came out to the parapet on the gate tower after the gates were closed, and called to know if I was there. All has been quiet."

"Then you are satisfied with our position here?"

"*Sahib*, as usual, your wisdom, is enough for your

servants. We have made a good start, and I see honourable service before us. The men are well content and have been anxious at your absence."

David smiled and giving the old man his dismissal, withdrew to his own quarter near the entrance to the Governor's apartments. Salabat Khan, he was told, had ordered his litter to be carried in to the ladies' portion of the palace, and all seemed quiet.

It was not long after noon the next morning when the Lord Altamish, with retinue, presented himself at the gate of the palace and demanded entrance in order to pay his respects to His Excellency, and congratulate him on having quelled the *emeute* in Hari Parbat so effectively. Salabat Khan had been prescribed cooling draughts by the court physician, and contrary to expectation had been able to transact business all the morning. Orders were given for Altamish to be admitted. With him rode Daoud Shah, now guide, philosopher, and friend, *vice* Wali Dad, who had fallen from his high estate. They were admitted to the inner court. There, standing dismounted against the wall, was David, still wearing his dragoon helmet. To Daoud Shah this was disconcerting. There was the very man whom he had represented to Altamish as sitting in the seat of Salabat Khan. To Altamish happily the young Anglo-Indian was unknown, but Daoud Shah ground his teeth with suppressed fury. Here again was he up against this unknown influence that had so humbled him in the Begum Somru's camp.

On Yar Khan's advice the wounded Governor had himself carried back to his own apartments, and there gave Altamish a short personal audience. The interview was purely formal. As he came out, Yar Khan could not refrain from a little banter, as he conducted the Toork to his horse.

"Ah, my Lord, His Excellency is sadly fatigued as

you saw. We all marvel he was so well the day he rode with you from the Amiran Kādāl. He was wounded as you had heard, in a skirmish with Rajpoots and certainly ought to have taken more care of the wound. But, as you know, he cares little for himself."

But Altamish was not always quick in the uptake, and his mind was preoccupied with Daoud Shah's assurance that he would find on close inspection that the Governor was not Salabat Khan. He had, however, convinced himself that the man he had interviewed and paid his respects to actually was Salabat Khan himself, and no other. From which he thought that Daoud Shah had been talking as the Afghans say, through his sleeve. Any possibility of substitution had not occurred to him. Yar Khan's remarks therefore contained for him no suggestion, and after passing the saluting guard at the gate, he rallied Daoud Shah on his absurd suggestion that Salabat Khan was not the man who had ridden through the city two days ago. But Daoud Shah the Afghan was not to be drawn at that moment, and merely replied that if his Lordship said so it was no doubt correct, and they went their way in silence through the city and out to the house and garden on the Dhall Lake.

Salabat, fatigued though he was, insisted on holding conclave with Yar Khan and David on the military affairs of the province, which must be thoroughly overhauled if trouble was ahead. David came in from the main-gate, saluting smartly after the English fashion, and the Governor smiled approval.

"Ferassa *Sahib*, the *Wazir* and I have been talking of our forces, and they must be increased; are you willing to help us in all our military affairs?"

"Certainly, Your Excellency, so far as my knowledge goes."

"*Balé*, very well! First of all I now commission

you to raise your troop to a whole *rissalah* of 150 lances as soon as can be. Do you see your way to that ? ”

“ If I have full authority, and may offer the terms that are necessary, I think I can. My own troop will be a nucleus, especially if I have a free hand in promoting my officers and non-commissioned officers. I want to work on the Irregular system of the Company *Bahadur*. I want to group each troop by clan and race.”

“ I have every confidence in you, and you shall have the freest of hands. But I want more than that. There are two *rissalahs* of state horse already. You must assist in improving them. There are two regiments of infantry, the Regiment of Victory and the Regiment of the Sun, *Fateh-ki-Pultan* and *Suraj-ki-Pultan*. You must inspect these and their arms, and must tell me what improvements you recommend ; and how I can make them up to the standard of Hindostan. Further, my artillery is not right. I have several cannon, but very few trained gunners. I will give you full control over them, and they must be improved. You shall have what you want from the military stores. You agree with me, Yar Khan ? ”

The old warrior nodded approval, and David said, “ Your Excellency, I can but try. My father was an artillery officer of the Company *Sahib Bahadur*, and I learnt much of cannon from him. One or two of my men have served the Company as artillerymen.”

And Salabat Khan smiled again and said, “ I have full trust.”

From which it will be seen that Yar Khan had evidently formed a high opinion of the lad and had said so freely, so that after the manner of Eastern courts, David was about to rise from humble grade to high command by the mere word of the ruler. Fortunately youth is buoyant and of full ambition. David

felt that he certainly knew more of the military methods which had made the armies of the Company so successful, than any one else in the province.

Salabat Khan continued. "You may have such money as you require from my treasury, and all stores."

David knew something of the ways of storekeepers in Indian states.

"May I have authority to bully all storekeepers who try and put me off with worthless stores?"

The Governor laughed. "You have my full permission to blow any storekeeper or fraudulent *teh-kidar** away from a cannon. Will that suffice?"

David gravely replied that it would, and pocketed written authority that the munshi gave him. Yar Khan then suggested that it would be well if David moved his own troop out to the shores of the Dhall Lake, to the opposite side to that on which was the garden of Altamish, here there were some vacant lines, and where he could camp under the walnut groves, leaving his men there while absent on his tours of inspection.

David, too, was anxious enough to get his own men clear away from the palace and the always demoralizing influence of the city, as well as to start his new enlistments in freer surroundings. An order to draw tents from the palace store was given him, and arrangements to move the camp by water at once put in progress. With every possible expression of confidence from Salabat Khan, David then set about his business and his move into camp. Well equipped with an order on stores and treasury, and the Begum Somru's second bill of exchange still uncashed in his pocket, he felt that the sinews of war were his.

* Contractor.

CHAPTER XVIII

WITH MIRIAM IN THE GARDEN

OF all the wonderful and beautiful things in this very beautiful world, there are few that will compare with a spring morning in the vale of Kashmir. The countryside covered with fruit blossom, the almond tree flourishing and the apple and the cherry in all their glory. The mountains overhanging the Dhall towered over the water in all the splendour of their mantle of snow. Wild tulips and iris grew in every stretch of grass, and the very graves with their iris fringe echoed the joy of the morning. The glorious sap of spring was mantling in the youth of the plant as well as the human world.

In the Nishat Bagh the fountains sparkled and the waterfall over the carved and nicked cascades danced in the morning sun. The orchards in all their finery, and the green turf fresh from its winter sheet of snow on the mountain side above the gardens, dazzled the eye with their freshness. Up on the slopes the sun shone on the ruins of the Palace of Fairies, the cells and courts of an ancient Buddhist monastery. Outside the garden walls with the moss-covered copings, the cascades trickled into the lake. Two of the vice-regal barges bobbed with the ripple of the water, and thrust their noses into the rushes by the marble landing steps, while the boatmen played cards and smoked on the steps.

Inside, the Lady Miriam walked alone pulling showers of almond blossom on to her shoulders as she passed. Up on the top terrace three of her ladies sat or reclined on shawls listening to fairy stories and Persian couplets from old Noonu Balia, a famous teller of stories to the ladies of the household. She told of real love and adventure. Such love as they all knew never came to women outside of the story books, but which it comforted them to think could at any rate be written of. But Miriam had soon tired of the tales and strode away. It were better to walk by one's self among the almond blossom and listen to one's own thoughts, than to the poor stuff that Noonu told. But why poor stuff? It had always sufficed before. And the answer, though Miriam would not have acknowledged it, was that her own heart was telling her a far more stirring tale. The rich spring sap was, indeed, circulating, and there were pleasant thrills in consequence, and my lady knew, she knew not why, that the world was a very beautiful world, and that it was oh! so good to be in it. And then since Noonu was set for an hour, and the girls too lazy to wish to stir, Miriam thought that she would venture outside the garden, by the gardeners' hole in the wall at the end of the top terrace. So out she slipped to find the air even fresher without and the world even brighter.

Outside the wall a footpath led away gently up the hillside away to the Palace of Fairies, and Miriam wondered where it went. To wonder in her then mood was to follow. She climbed gently, just with the pleasant feeling of being out for a spree. Since Afghan maids are not so bound to seclusion as those of Hindostan, she was not in the least disconcerted at having left her companions behind; but to be alone on a mountain side with never a human in sight on a sunshiny spring morning with a wonderful

new song a singing in her heart was fine wine for a hill girl of high degree.

Up the path my lady clomb, past tufts of little red tulips, and whole prayer carpets of violets, the gentle *banafra* that half Kashmir will be soon gathering as a spring simple. On past the shooting wild rose that is hardly aware that winter is gone, and the purple and white iris flower of forgotten graves. In the young grass the red-legged *chikor* was making its nest and calling for his mate, *chikor! chikor! chikor!* rather surprised to see a maid alone in the mating season of the year. Down in the lake below, Miriam watched the fishers, standing in the prow of their narrow boats with their pronged tridents aloft, a novel way to catch fish, and a very good one, and none so easy withal. Above, the Palace of Fairies stood out in the sunlight with its beautiful rows of arches and delicate plinths, so old that no man had ever heard from his fathers who built it, and for what purpose; and all the world was content to say that it must have been the fairies, whom in England we should call the pixies, or some say the Pictses, the painted people. Miriam thought little save that it was a beautiful sight perched above the young hillside against a clear blue sky, and that the old Buddhist monks who must have built it, had a keen eye for a beautiful site. Presently Miriam broke into the graded road, now thickly overgrown, that the monastery folk and their visitors must have used. Fine roadmakers were those old Buddhist and Græco-Bactrian communities.

The Palace of Fairies was haunted, badly haunted; that all Kashmir knew, but Miriam was in the mood for adventure and the unseen had for the moment few terrors. She left the shepherds' path to turn up the graded road, putting up a hare as she did so. Puss did not run far, for partner hare was waiting under an

adjacent thorn bush. The old road was not, however, absolutely unused. A straggling footpath with bruised stones wandered up the old grading, and Miriam climbed lightly up it. She did not see a solitary upright figure in white waiting and watching, till she turned up the final gradient and had seated herself on a corner plinth to gaze at the view unfolded. Then, the noise of a footstep made her start, and a voice said, "Peace be with you, daughter."

The greeting was the greeting of Islam, and Miriam automatically replied, "And with you, too, father!" and then looked up to find that it was not as she had expected some *moollah*, guardian of a shrine, but the Christian *padré*, whom she knew well by sight, but had never before spoken to. She had long wondered what manner of man he was, and had heard folk talk of the sick whom he had cured. Since she had been thrown with David she had begun to realize something of that mysterious white race, of whom all the East now talked, whether they had seen them or no. Then there was that Western conception of women, of which David had spoken to her, with all the wonder of honour, protection and consideration that seemed to be implied. She would much like to ask the *padré*, the man of religion, something of it, if she dare, and something, too, of that religion to which she had heard that it was due. She got up from her seat on the plinth, and thereon the Abbé made her a most graceful, courteous bow, which none knew how to make better than he. Miriam instinctively understood the deference and respect implied. Here was a man who could be talked to quite freely if need be, which was exactly the impression that the Abbé had conveyed to all who met him since he was a boy at the old seminary in Malbeigella-fontaine. It was a worn, aged face now, that looked down on the lady, a face that had seen much sorrow

and much bitterness, and had come by way of such to a peace that passed all understanding. And as those faded blue eyes gazed into that clean-bred well-cut young face, the wrinkles seemed to fade away and the face looked as it had looked in the days when half the court ladies raved of it because it could not, or would not, be theirs ; and yet was ever ready to help those who needed it. Beautiful imperious *La Lamballe* herself had been known to take rebuke, and to ask for guidance, she whom neither man nor woman had dared thwart in her thoughtless ways.

"So, Lady, you are not afraid to come alone to the Palace of Fairies ? There be few in Kashmir who would come here, on to-day of all days, too, the Festival of Spring."

"Father, I know not why I have come, save that I take the air, wandering up from yonder garden."

"Ah, Lady, there is not a fairer place in all the earth this day, than this plinth of the Palace of Fairies. You do well to enjoy it. You are, I think, the sister of His Excellency the Governor of Kashmir."

"That is so, father, and you ? . . . You, I know well as that Christian *padré* who cures so many of the sick that would otherwise die."

"Daughter, if I am permitted to heal the sick; it is but the work that my Master has appointed me to do."

"Your master, who is he ?"

"My Master is the Lord Jesus, the Son of the God of all the Universe."

"The Prophet Iswi, *Aleh Salaam!* * I have heard of; but I do not understand."

"That is surely not surprising. Some day when occasion offers I will try and explain what you now find strange."

* Peace be with him.

"Father, there are many questions I would ask."

"I do not doubt it, daughter."

"Father, you laugh at me?"

"God forbid, daughter, that I a man, let alone a priest, should laugh at a woman."

And here the Abbé's eyes puckered into a thousand wrinkles, and Miriam looked up into them and saw . . . what she saw, and broke into a merry happy laugh, such as was good for aged weary priests to see. The eyes wrinkled more than ever.

"Father, I have heard that the English treat women quite differently from the way that we of the East do. That a man marries one woman alone and protects her to the end, whether she be old or whether she be young. Is that so?"

"To their shame there be many who do not, daughter, but all right men do; and that is not only the English who do so, but all those of the Christian faith. I am not English, though I know them for a just people. I am a Frenchman, and the French, too, treat women, or aim to do so, as I have said."

"Then, father, if a man marries a woman, will he care for her and house her all his life; and that too, when she be old and querulous?"

"Right men do so, and it is accounted a shame and a wrong when men do not."

"And a man does not bring a young woman to his house when his wife ceases to please?"

"He does not, or it is accounted a shame if he does; and in no case would she be his wedded wife."

"Truly this is a wonderful thing. I heard so before, but could hardly believe it."

"But tell me now, my daughter, what makes you ask these questions of the English, and how they treat their women? Know you aught of them? Their

rule is yet far from this province and from the Punjab."

And Miriam was for the moment at a loss for an answer, but said at last, with the blood mantling to a cheek sufficiently olive to hide it, that she had lately met a young *Sahib* whom His Excellency had employed as a captain of horse, and had had some conversation with him.

Whereon the Abbé had mused as to himself, and said half aloud—

"Is it good for East and West to wed?"

And Miriam had heard him, and broke in, "His father married an Afghan lady."

Whereon the Abbé had looked up at her, and the thousand wrinkles grew a thousand more.

"And wherefore not, lady, wherefore not. Far be it from me to suggest such a thing."

"Father, you are mocking at me again."

And Jean Armande laughed, just the low, quiet, reliant laugh that *La Lamballe* loved, but would not have told him so for all the world.

"Lady, I would not mock any woman, as I have said before. Much less a woman who is in love."

"Who told you I was in love, father?"

"You did yourself."

"I, father? How dare you say such things? A princess of the Duranni in love like a village girl! In love! . . . And Miriam snatched at her veil which had fallen back over her shoulders, and swinging sharply round marched off with a very indignant chin in the air, till she disappeared behind the grey walls of the old façades of the ruin.

The Abbé sat silent on the plinth while a faint smile played round his mouth and eyes. It was very, very long since a woman of sweetness and daintiness had talked to him, and the experience was very pleasing,

and sad, too, for all the tragedy of the days when women had crossed his path.

"Father, tell me about the sick and how you make the blind see."

The Abbé moved not at all, neither looked he up.

"Sit down, Lady, and let us converse. The sick and the blind I heal when I can because I long studied the healing arts when young. Sometimes the blessing of God falls on my work, and I am able to cure those who long have been deemed incurable."

"Tell me something of the God of Christians, that makes men treat the sick and women so."

Then the Abbé rose with a soft look in the eyes and said—

"Daughter, that I will tell you with pleasure on some future occasion, I must now be about my business. It is a very wonderful and beautiful story that I have to tell. But it is not told in an hour; but this I would have you ponder over. The God of the Christians is a God of love and of peace and of truth, such as you who have lived in the fierce Afghan hills can hardly conceive. . . ."

Suddenly the Abbé thought of his Princess and Fouquier Tinquerville, and *La Veuve* ever waiting her spouse . . . and wondered how such things could be explained to wild Afghans. So that Miriam slipped away down the mountain side, unnoticed, till he felt as if the sun had gone behind a cloud. Then with a sigh he turned to his shed behind the ruin, and Miriam on her way down, met two villagers leading a third with bandaged eyes, who said they were going up with grandfer to see the *padré hakim* * *sahib* who lived up on the hill.

Miriam, wondering and happy, re-entered the garden

* Doctor.

to find her companions still engrossed in a third and more wonderful story, and slipped down on the ground beside old Noonu, whose tale now fairly echoed again with *peris* and heroes and gorgeous horsemen. After which it was high time to clap hands for the boatmen and to reassemble the party to return across the lake.

CHAPTER XIX

DAVID'S CAMP ON THE DHALL

OUT in the old cantonment lines on the Dhall Lake, David was as happy as a king. The enlisting and training of soldiers is a fascinating sport to the young man of enterprise, who has inherited any spark of the power of command and leadership. David was certainly not lacking in this, and had, moreover, the good temper and patience which is necessary to train both man and horse. Two of the many duties had seemed urgent and to demand priority. First, the raising of his own *rissalah*, and secondly, the assembling and organizing of such artillery as the province possessed. The *rissalah* had been the first care, and he had sat in solemn conclave with Ganesha Singh the old Rajpoot officer, Nihal Singh, the daring Dogra Rajpoot of the Moon, and Gul Jan Duranni his father's Afghan orderly, and they were three wise men that sat with him. David's experience in native states had taught him that there was one thing that Irregular troops of India, either in the Company's service or in that of native potentates, understood better than the Company's Line, viz. that to get the best out of men they must be organized by sept and clan and tribe, under their own class leaders, rather than mingled cheek by jowl regardless of sympathy and liking for each other. His father had always preached the

same, and explained how first the Highland regiments had been raised on these lines with MacKenzie companies and Cameron companies, Fraser companies, and the like, and that it was the Saxon imagination that failed to realize the value of it. Old Fraser had always said that it was the Celtic imagination that saved the Saxon stolidity, and the Saxon stolidity that leavened Celtic wildness to make a ruling race. The principle, at any rate, was firm in David's mind to have clans troops in his *rissalah*. Two should be Hindu and two Mussalman, one from the Marathas and Rajpoot clans of India so far as they might come to hand so far north, and one from Nihal Singh's friends on the westerly slopes of the Pir Panjal, one from Afghan's proper whether Rohilla settled in India or from the northern hills, and the last troop Moguls and other Muhammadans. There were several men in David's original troop who were well fitted to be non-commissioned officers in the new corps, and in a week or so close on seventy satisfactory men and nearly a hundred horses had been got together. The latter, almost all of Afghan or Biluch breed, with a few of the curly coated Badakshani ponies. The Begum Somru's *hundi* on the Srinagar bankers had given ample funds to supplement those allowed by the Governor, and his men were well equipped.

Then fortune had favoured his enterprise, for riding through the city the very day that Salabat Khan had given him the military instructions described, he had seen a European leaning and smoking outside the travellers' *serai* in the city. It was the person whose arrival had been reported by the *kotwal*. David had forgotten the fact as reported, but a sight of the traveller had recalled it. It was a European, there was no doubt of that. Moreover, he was clothed in a well-worn but scrupulously clean officer's undress coatee of blue

broad cloth, with white breeches and what were known as "half" boots. He was clean shaven, and his red hair flecked with grey was tied back in a rough queue. A French cavalry sabre trailed at his side, and a telescope was slung over his back. On his head was a flat Austrian field cap, with a bag and tassel, that had seen better days. David had some acquaintance with the European adventurer class, indeed, was one himself, and readily passed the time of day after the manner of the freelances, which is ornate. The stranger returned David's greeting with a military salute.

"It's little enough I expected to find a European here at all," said he. "I'm glad to meet you, sorr."

"You've come from Rajputana, I fancy."

"I've come a long way, sorr, and that is thrue for you. I was with the Chevalier Dudrenac, and for a while with Colonel James Skinner."

"Do you know anything about artillery?"

"Do I not, sorr! I was gunner's mate of a Frinch privateer before I joined the Company's Artillery at Madras as a matross of the Company."

"Are you open to employment?"

"I am, sorr, if it's good enough and honourable, for I am a man of honour."

"I am in command of the cavalry and artillery of the troops of His Excellency Salabat Khan, Governor of this province. I am Major Fraser, and I can probably offer you employment."

"I shall be indebted to you, sorr, for I have come here in search of military service. Me name is Captain Lucius Tone at your service, late of the service of His Highness the Mararajah Scindiah." And here Captain Tone once again bowed and saluted. "Are you by chance, sorr, the Fraser who held the Tantri Pass against Dudrenac *Sahib* and his Pindarees on behalf of the Rajah of Kothi?"

"I am."

"Then it is proud I'll be to serve under ye, sorr ; ye may take my word for it."

So David had ridden back forthwith to see His Excellency and Yar Khan and obtain sanction to offer the adventurer a salary of rupees three hundred *per mensem*. This was duly accepted, and in a few days Captain Lucius Tone, with his servant Pando and his Gulf Arab horse Monaghan were duly installed as captain of artillery to the province of Kashmir. David very soon found that he really did know something of his business. Nihal Singh and Gul Jan were agreed on this point, for a wonder. They had both long experience of artillery as seen from the gunner's point of view, and Tone certainly filled that. Six rickety pieces, varying from four to nine pounders, had been collected from the Shergarhi and elsewhere as an instalment. Tone was at once turned loose on these, and with two smiths and a couple of carpenters from the city was busy repairing their carriages. The tyres had to come off the wheels and be cut and shrunk, and the felloes wanted refitting, and the trails shaking out, till at first it seemed that repairs would mean the scrapping of the ordnance altogether. This, however, the artilleryman would not admit. The pieces were inferior he was bound to admit. "May I be rammed, crammed, and damned down the big gun of Athlone if iver I see a worse lot," was his comment, saving always a small bronze piece with a Persian inscription, that proclaimed the piece had been cast in Samarkand for the "glory of God and His Prophet," by one Imamuddeen Ghazi. It was of gun metal and a hundred years old at least, but of exquisite lines and as sound as a bell, and the heart of Lucius Tone went out to it, as the heart of man to woman. He would so mount it and sight it, and fix

such elevators that it should be famous in all the north. It bore the poetic name of the "*Iqd-i-Gul*" or "Bunch of Roses" quite different from the assertive names of guns of rougher casting. Now gunners are queer folk with their guns, and their pieces always have some psychological influence over them, so that they die with them but leave them not. To the "Bunch of Roses" Lucius Tone had attached himself, and it was well he did so.

A few weeks after the opening of the cantonment on the Dhall, on a bright sunny morning of that warm spring month, David and all his assistants were at work. Tone had two gun-carriages stripped on the ground with his artificers busy while two newly enlisted artillerymen were polishing the "Bunch of Roses" under a spreading walnut tree, on which the young leaves were shining in the morning sun. David himself sat at a table, two munshis at his feet with lacquered pen box and shiny native rolls of paper, making out pay rolls. His experience in native states had taught him that by way of the pay roll came loyalty and obedience. He had seen that, too, at the Begum Somru's *campo* when he had rescued that good lady from her painful seat on her red-hot piece of ordnance. So an accurate pay roll and regular payments were his first care. The *rissalah* was daily increasing as emissaries collected suitable men. David had carried out his instructions to overhaul the two battalions of infantry, and he found that at present, though not void of good material, their power of drill and manoeuvre was practically nil. Happily Lucius Tone had come to the rescue by producing a drill book that the Chevalier Dudrenac had given him. It was one of the drill books published when the Republican armies were shaking themselves free from their first wildness, and a godsend, therefore, to a reformer, the same as

that from which the Begum Somru's *Kommadans* culled a few movements. But it was one thing to be able to read the French haltingly, as David could, and quite another to put it into Persian for the use of the troops. The book said—

'*Un bataillon en bataille, rompant par peleton à droite. Nota: On voit l'adjutant-major qui après qu'on a rompu le bataillon, s'est porté sur l'avertissement du chef de bataillon.*' . . . How should such be translated? Tone, it is true, understood some French, but neither enough of that nor enough Persian to translate a drill book.

While David was puzzling over his new acquisition and admiring the plates that showed men in chakoes and splatterdashes '*dans la position d'apretez vos armes, or l'arme au bras,*' Gul Jan came up to say that a *padré sahib* sent salaams and was waiting to see him.

"A *padré sahib!*" said David. "What *padré sahib?*"

"I don't know, *Sahib*, but they say he is a *padré doctor sahib* who has lived many years in Kashmir, and cures sick people when the *hakims* can't. He is an *Angrez*, or a *Frank*."

"Ask him to come in." And David rose to receive the visitor much wondering, and to call for another seat.

Coming towards him through the tents and the neatly piled lances which his men had just learnt to arrange from him, David saw a thin white figure with a white skull cap, such as he remembered having seen near the Catholic church in Agra. Then in another minute he was bowing to the Abbé Jean Armande du Plessis, and even shaking hands after the manner of Europe, while the Abbé explained how he often came to a hut of his on the hill above the lake by the Palace of Fairies, and having heard that there was a white man below, had ventured to pay his respects,

half expecting to find a countryman, of whom so many had come to India. And while he spoke David gazed into the high-bred, clean-cut face, and the myriad crowsfeet that played thereon, and the faded yet active eyes that looked straight at you under the brows, with determination and kindness intermingled.

"I am no countryman, father, I am Scotch or partly so by descent, and my mother was a Duranni. I am not even of your faith, but I am very very glad to meet you, and I hope I may often see you. I shall be here some time training His Excellency's soldiers."

"Ah! I heard of you from a lady who told me that the Governor had entertained a European. She had, I think, seen you, and spoken highly of you."

"Surely," said David eagerly. "Surely not the Lady Miriam."

"The same, my son," replied the Abbé with a hint of a smile playing among the crowsfeet round his mouth. "Surely a gracious lady."

"Ah!" was all that David could find to say, and then the Abbé's eye lighted on the open drill book.

"Aha, there is something that I know, my old friend *Le Colonel de Savignac's* work. Yes, I thought so. . . ."

"*Planches relatives au règlement concernant l'exercice et les manœuvres de l'infanterie.*" *A Lille, Chez Blocquelle, 1791.* Ah, I know it well. You study it?"

"I am trying to read it and put it into Persian for His Excellency's battalions, but I find I do not quite understand it."

"Perhaps I can help here. '*Six bataillons la droite en tête qui se forment en ligne,*' that would be '*Shash batayon darawat en tet laim mee kunand.*' But you don't want to deal with a brigade, do you? Let us get back to *L'école de bataillon.*"

Then for a couple of hours David and his new friend were absorbed in translating that drill book, by which time Tone had finished examining the stripped ordnance, had designed a new tangent sight for the "Bunch of Roses," and strolled over to report to his commander.

David saw him coming, and said to the Abbé, "Here comes an assistant of mine, an Irishman. I must present him to you, but first may I crave your name, we have been so busy translating that we have forgotten ceremony. I am David Fraser at your service, of Scottish descent."

"Ah, my dear sir, the honour is mine. I am the Abbé Armande du Plessis, of the Society of Jesus. To both Scots and Irish we French always extend the hand of welcome and *cameraderie*. Present me to your friend."

"Captain Tone, may I present to you the Abbé du Plessis, who has paid us the courtesy of calling, and has been helping me these two hours to translate your drill book."

Lucius Tone stepped eagerly up on seeing the Abbé's clerical garb, and at once knelt and craved a blessing, which Armande du Plessis, seeing that the new-comer was a Catholic, readily gave. It was the first Catholic he had seen for many a long year. When Tone had recovered his standing position he took off his cap and saluted, and then du Plessis said—

"My son, it is long since I met one of our Faith. I must have a long talk with you and hear, so far as I may, whence you come. Do you talk French?"

"I do, your Riverence. Was I not gunner's mate on a Frinch privateer for a matter of three years?"

And then ensued a lively conversation in what Tone considered to be on his part the best of French, so that even David, who knew but little of the language, and

that from books, could not help smiling. The brogue of Tone was delicious and soft and captivating in itself, but hardly suited to the seafaring argot which made up the most of his vocabulary. To the Abbé, however, the pleasure of using his own tongue made up a thousandfold for the other's shortcomings.

He was then pressed to stay to their tiffin, which was laid under the trees looking out over the lake; and he did so, blessing the meal with a Latin grace which David had not heard since he had been to the old Lodge in Agra with his father. And so the time passed happily till the guest rose to go, each feeling that they were a small European band of sympathizers who might look to each other for companionship and relaxation. The Abbé on going said—

"Gentlemen, I have a very tiny hovel near the Mosque Hamadan, in the city, where you are always welcome, and I have a small room which I use as a dispensary up on the hillside. The country folk come to me there. I am always there o' Sundays, and shall welcome you even more there in the beautiful sunshine. It is built up by a few peasants against the back of the ruin of the Palace of Fairies."

David walked with him to the edge of the camp. "I heard of you, my son, if I may call you so, as I said, from the Lady Miriam, who spoke of some great service you had rendered. I thought her a sweet girl, too sweet to lead the life of tragedy among these Afghan nobles."

"The lady makes much of my small services, but I am proud that she should remember them. She is a lady of great courage and spirit."

"She questioned me much about the ways of the European, especially their treatment of women."

"She would question me, too, father, when we had opportunity. It is not often that a maid can question

any one in this barbaric land, but we rode together awhile by difficult roads and so had quiet conversation."

"Ah well," returned the Abbé. "May the good God grant her happiness and show her the way of peace. I fear there are troublous times ahead. The Toork faction in this valley are getting very powerful. They are dribbling in adherents steadily. I fancy the power of the Emperor at Kabul is waning. It is a great empire and hard to manage. Louis XV., himself of pious memory, could not have controlled all these demons. I would warn you especially against an Afghan I have met in Kashmir, aye, and elsewhere. He goes now by the name of Daoud Shah, David—the same name as yourself. That the name of the great David, the son of Jesse, should be borne by such a scoundrel! That is, I know, but an alias. He is a mysterious and evil man. Before I joined the priesthood I was induced to join a secret society, which, as you know, is anathema to mother Church. I found, however, that he, too, knew some of the secrets that I had learnt. I will tell you some day how I came to know this. Beware of him."

"I have some ken of him, too, father, and am forewarned. I, too, am of that society, I fancy."

"Ah! you surprise me. Perhaps it is all for the good that it should be so. I will talk further of this also with you. Now adieu, my son! It has given me great pleasure to meet you two gentlemen."

David watched the light, erect figure stride down the slope and out of the camp as if his life was beginning rather than nearing its end, and prayed that he, too, might be as worthy. More especially he prayed that it might be given to him to protect the Lady Miriam through life, and especially to see her through the brewing troubles. And then he walked off to go round the horse lines, the last care of all horse soldiers.

CHAPTER XX

DURBAR AND FESTIVAL

It was not till several days after his return that Salabat Khan could think of holding his first public durbar or levée, though Yar Khan soon began to urge that it was really important to do so. Not only were there those who wished to see their chief after the rumours of his death and wound, but there were others with petitions to prefer, and there were several appeals from the orders of local officials to be heard. The Governor then expressed himself well enough to hold a formal durbar the day after the next, which would be the Festival of Spring, when the whole city would be illuminated in the evening, and the river be crowded with boats covered in small lamps. At this procession the vice-regal barges were usually present, and it was the custom for His Excellency to proceed in state by water to be dined by some leading personages of the city, whose ladies received the palace ladies behind the grille. It would be convenient to hold the durbar the morning of that day. The usual notices were promptly issued, and the town criers sent through the city. David was directed to be present with his own *rissalah*, and the garrison of Shergarhi would also attend.

On the appointed day the Durbar duly assembled in the great hall of audience, and curiosity as well as

business brought all those who could by any means claim a right to a seat. With them also came many of the general public, for at the Governor's Durbar there was no limit to all of orderly behaviour who might enter into the outer court and stand, if they could find room at the bottom of the hall.

The scene was one of considerable magnificence. In the outer court Habib Ullah's bodyguard, and David's *rissalah*, were drawn up facing each other. Two of His Excellency's elephants in gold-embroidered caparisons and newly-painted trunks shuffled ceaselessly. Outside the palace gate, a score or so of beggars, blind, shrivelled, and leprous, whined for alms. On a raised daïs at the end of the hall sat His Excellency, surrounded by his principal officers. Standing on either side of the hall were those who had the right of *entrée*, and in the middle of the hall was ample space for petitioners and litigants to advance to the foot of the daïs. Among those who had the *entrée* was, of course, the Lord Altamish, handsomely apparelled in embroidered plum silk with a jewelled sword. As His Excellency had advanced up the hall to the daïs, many of the *sirdars* presented him with the hilts of their swords as a sign of fealty usually only proffered to royalty, merely to be touched as a sign of acceptance of service. Altamish himself, while reviling in his heart, was fain to do as the demands of policy needed, and extend his inlaid sword hilt also, marvelling the while on the folly of Daoud Shah, who had said that the Governor did not ride through the city that day. Salabat Khan stopped in his passage up the hall to talk with the more prominent of those present. Some of the Afghan landowners from the more distant valleys had come in to felicitate the Governor on his escape and recovery, rugged old chiefs, some of them holding large fiefs in the Lolab Valley, where they

lived on their estates and grew capons at ease under Salabat Khan's competent *régime*.

Finally moving to his seat of audience on the daïs the ordinary work began. There were two complaints of exorbitant demands from the tax-gatherer, and a third for remission of revenue owing to damage from a flood. Then a complaint from a farmer up on the Kashmir side of the Pir Panjal, who said that Rajpoots had come over the frontier and carried off his sheep. And so forth, none of first importance, and Salabat Khan grew bored, and his mood became whimsical. Kneeling on the steps of the daïs was the treasurer, Nubbi Bakhsh, busy counting over a bag of tribute sent in that morning. Now, according to the customs of the East, those on the daïs had removed their shoes, while those below in the body of the hall did not. Presently one of the spies, without whom no Oriental methods of rule are complete, went round behind Salabat Khan and whispered that every now and then Nubbi Bakhsh slipped a coin into his shoe. It has been mentioned that His Excellency was in a whimsical mood. He looked at Nubbi Bakhsh and then at the *Wazir* Yar Khan.

"Yar Khan!" he called aloud. "Yar Khan! what beastly big feet you've got."

Now, Yar Khan had his shoes off, and was intensely taken aback by this sudden attack.

"My feet! Your Excellency, my feet! They are no bigger than those of a soldier should be."

"Nonsense, man, I tell you they are beastly feet. Now, if you want to see nice graceful feet, you should see Nubbi Bakhsh's. Here, Nubbi Bakhsh! Stop counting out rupees. Come up on the daïs here and let the gentry see what very well-made feet you have. I want the *Sirdar* Yar Khan to be ashamed of his."

But Nubbi Bakhsh did not respond with alacrity.

He was feeling unwell. His mother was dying. His feet were not fit to be shown to gentry; he would crave His Excellency's permission to withdraw. . . . But His Excellency would have none of it.

"Come here at once, Nubbi Bakhsh, do you hear me!" he shouted in a voice that before now has portended a vacancy in a culprit's family. And poor Nabbi Bakhsh the publican crawled on to the *daïs*.

"Take your shoes off," said the same stern voice.

Poor Nubbi Bakhsh, who had no friends, slipped off his shoes, and as he did so a gold *mohr* rolled to the ground.

"Hold up his shoes."

Some one held up his shoes. There rolled out on to the floor four gold coins, and half a dozen rupees.

"Nubbi Bakhsh," said the Governor, "this is a pretty way to pilfer my revenue as you count the bags before me. You will now go to the Shergarhi dungeon till you pay in to me the sum of one *lakh* of rupees to teach you to play tricks on me again."

Nubbi Bakhsh, the picture of woe, with tears rolling down his cheeks, was removed, while the whole Durbar roared with laughter. A good jest at some one else's expense was the very thing wanted to cheer them. No one had any sympathy with a tax-gatherer or revenue official. Such people by instinct accumulated illgotten gains, and when judiciously bled would always disgorge if needs must. Nubbi Bakhsh would, of course, pay up. He probably had pilfered twice that sum. No government in the East, except perhaps that of the Company, had ever been able to contend against it, and many devices were used to keep it within bounds. In the villages now and again the village money-lender and corn merchant would be roasted over a slow fire till he, too, disgorged. It was

the only known way to keep such folk within reason.

Nubbi Bakhsh paid the next day and was released, still weeping. This little diversion over, Salabat Khan and his officers returned with new zest to business, and for an hour the assembly in the hall chatted while complaints and reports were heard at the head of the room. These over, His Excellency called for the reports of the frontier wardens. From the Lolab, all quiet, but rumours of unrest among the Black Mountain tribes. From Gurais, one or two raids, by men of the Trans-Indus Kohistan. From Skardu, merchants reported raids by Khanjut robbers from Hunza. From Bunjee more reports of raids and threatened incursions from Tangir and Darel. The outlook was not quite satisfactory. The Governor had called to David to hear the reports, and had emphasized to him the necessity for getting the army ready in case serious action should become necessary. What about the mountain guns? Would they be fit to take the field? David explained his plans for mounting them on Yarkand ponies to be carried on pack in pieces. He and Tone were preparing two small mortars and two cannon. The Governor expressed approval.

"If this goes on, Ferassa *Sahib*, I shall have to go and hammer these people. They are not too easy to get at, so get everything ready as soon as you can. Do you want any orders on the store or the treasury? We will make Nubbi Bakhsh pay. He won't get the revenue from Gurais if we don't have good troops."

David had a vanity, as officers of cavalry often have. He very much wanted to give his own men an embroidered waist cloth, and a crimson saddle cloth to their horse which should also serve as a horse rug in the field. If Nabbi Bakhsh pays, why not? He got

them and went his way rejoicing at this extra finery. The essentials of war he had already obtained for his reorganization.

Soon after noon, business was finished and Salabat Khan gave the assembly the *rukhsat*, viz. the leave to depart. The higher *sirdars* went with a fanfare from the cavalry trumpets, and as Altamish rode through the gates he was joined by Daoud Shah, who had been among the throng at the lower end of the hall. Altamish remarked to him on the improved appearance of the cavalry on duty in the courtyard, but this had by no means escaped the latter's notice. He had been keeping himself fairly well informed of all that was going on in the military line. Tone's employment, too, he knew of, and the improvement that was being made in the artillery. To Altamish he replied—

"I have noticed and have known of it for some time. That young half-breed, Ferassa *Sahib* they call him, is a good soldier. It will be easier for you to bring off your plans soon, than a year hence. Fortunately he is drilling his troops after the manner of the Company. Excellent against others in the plains of India, but little enough good when we get them up in the mountain gorges among the tribesmen of the hills. We must get the whole of this trained army there and wipe them out. You know how it has been done in the past. You know how Ahmed Shah himself lost a highly drilled force against the Ghilzais. There was once an army from Bactria under a Greek commander that came down against the Aprætæ whom men now call the Afridis. They were armed and marched as the Romans used to march, but they struggled out of those hills a tenth of those who went in. Their bones and their helmets strewed the Khyber for many a year."

"You talk of men and times I never heard of. Who were the Bactrians and the Romans? Had they anything to do with *Badshah* Sikander, and his men, who people say built those old ruins in Euzufzai?"

"Ah! *Badshah* Alexander was before my time, but he left a Greek kingdom behind him up in Bactria, near where Samarkand is now. He did leave garrisons in India, but they were swept away in a year or so. Not so the Bactrian kingdom. That lasted for many a generation, and those Bactrian kings reconquered eventually most of the Punjab. How do I know such things? Well, my Lord Altamish, I know them from two causes. First I read history and find myself the wiser therefore. Secondly, I myself . . . pshaw! You would not believe it if I told you. There is one man only in Kashmir, aye, for the matter of that in the world perhaps, who knows how I know the things I do know. Nay, my lord, there is nothing to start at. Surely a Toork is not easily disturbed. However, enough—but I agree with you that this pestilent young Englishman and his reformed horse will need watching. I have already arranged that he should be watched."

So Daoud Shah, vapouring and sneering, and the Toork listening uneasily, the choice spirits rode away together towards the city. David, after watching them out of sight and dismissing his men, strolled down to the river bank to watch the boatmen catch logs, and run them into the sand-bank. As he approached the bank, a considerable hubbub arose just below the palace steps. A great rice barge had collided with one of His Excellency's boats, and the Kashmiri boatmen were indulging in loud abuse, which chiefly took the form of destroying the credit of each other's female relatives. The Kashmiri is a huge muscular animal with a gift for quarrelsome

language which he is much too much of a poltroon to convert into any form of action. After endeavouring to get one set of boatmen to board the other's boat without avail David bade them sternly cease their clamour lest he beat them, and then moved up the bank to watch the state boats getting ready for the evening's festival. At the Festival of Spring it is the custom for half the town to come down the river after dark in boats, illuminated to the counter with myriads of *chirags*, small earthen lamps with a wick set in mustard oil, the which give a fairyland effect of great beauty. On the banks of the river the roofs of the houses, the window sills, and the door plinths would be similarly illuminated. It had been the custom during the last few years for the Governor to go in procession in his own illuminated barges to dinner with some noble, and this evening was to be no exception. Therefore it was that the state barges were being got ready for the evening.

Having whiled away half an hour or so for no better reason than that some sight or sign of the Lady Miriam might be vouchsafed; David bethought himself of work to do that afternoon out at his camp, and went in search of his orderly and his horse. There was still a squad of young troopers with whose riding he was not quite satisfied, and to whom Ganesha Singh had been giving an extra polish; he had promised to see them that afternoon. Tone also wanted him to see the new mountain gun equipment. Back, therefore, to camp he rode, intending to return in time to join in His Excellency's state progress. He had a boat of his own, which six of his troopers could paddle for him, and would come in that. That boat would be in waiting below the slopes of the Throne of Solomon, above the city, and he would ride across from his cantonment to it when his work was over. So planning,

David swung himself on to his horse and started for the Dhall at a hand canter. On his way through the Lal Bazaar he saw Daoud Shah in converse with half a dozen of the wildest looking hillmen as could well be imagined. They were dressed in slate-grey shirts and short loose drawers with a *kummerbund* stuck with pistols and knives. Gul Jan, who was with him, thought they must be Afridis from the Khyber, but as a matter of fact they were men from the Black Mountain come to see life in Kashmir.

It was after five before David could get away from his parade ground, and dark before he arrived at the bank where his *shikara* * awaited him. He called to them to light up the little lamps and row down to the landing steps of the Shergarhi, where he would join the Governor's procession. It was down stream, and the stout arms of his troopers soon brought the light-weight boat down to the Palace. Here, however, he was annoyed to find that His Excellency had left ten minutes earlier, and that he was too late to accompany the Governor's party. It was vexatious, very ! He had so hoped that he might have had speech with the Lady Miriam, and now he had probably missed the opportunity, and David swore audibly to himself after the manner of the English, at which old Gul Jan looked up and chuckled ; how like his father the boy was at times ! But fortune sometimes cometh to a man with both hands full. A figure stepped out from the shade of the watergate above, and called out, "Is that our boat, *Wazir Sahib* ?" It was Miriam herself.

"Nay, Lady," called the overjoyed David. "I have this boat for you."

Now, this was not strictly true, and suggested that

* A canoe-like boat propelled by paddles.

he had been specially left for her, but all is fair in love.

"How provoking of them to go on. Is that you, Ferassa *Sahib*? Will you help me down?"

Then David stepped on to the plinth and held out his hand, and for the first time held that fairy hand firmly in his, and very small and warm and fascinating it was, as he helped her down and over the gunwale into the little lacquered cupola in the stern of the boat.

"There is not much room here, *Sahib*. You had better sit down on the cushions here beside me." And then to some one up above, "You come in the next boat, Amah. I shan't want any one. I shall join the Bibi *Sahib*'s in the city," and then bade David push off.

It has been said that fortune cometh once and again with full hands. With the right she brought the Lady Miriam, with the left she offered David a seat beside her, a seat too, away from the crew who were steered by the leading paddle and not from the stern.

"Lady," began David, "I—I have long wanted to hear that you are no worse for our ride together, and your brave deeds that day."

"Ferassa *Sahib*, how can you talk of my brave deeds when I but sat the horse beside you and dear old Yar Khan. It was you. You, who rode as if you had been a governor all your life, and reassured the people, aye, and hanged that wicked *Kommadan*."

"Lady, an English poet wrote, 'They also serve who only stand and wait,' my father often read it to my mother. If you had not ridden so patiently and bravely beside us, I could not have gone through the part."

"Ah, now tell me more of your mother; and the English. You told me your mother was an Afghan

lady. It was a remarkable thing that she should marry an Englishman."

"Not at all, Lady Miriam. Sitting here with you it seems the most natural thing in the world, for an Englishman or half an Englishman to marry an Afghan lady."

And it must be admitted that David was making considerable progress in the art of serious love-making, which is perhaps the way of men of action. At any rate, the attack was too direct for Miriam to notice, and the two remained silent, David's heart beating as it had never beat before, and seeing now clear before him the course he would pursue, and the goal he would arrive at.

Then David said, "Though I speak of my father as English, he was really of another tribe that is allied with them, and sends many officers and men out to Hindostan. He was really a Scotchman, and they are a people who live up in great mountains like the Afghans, and would often fight among themselves. Tell me, Lady Miriam, would you come and be the wife of a Scotch adventurer in Hindostan, and live the life that a freelance lives? Would you trust yourself alone for ever with a Frank?"

It was a fairly abrupt proposal of marriage, far different from the ceremonious come and go of agents and matchmakers that would precede such matters in a high-grade Afghan family. But then Miriam had been leading a life far different from that of an ordinary maid of her class. Then there were other differences. An Afghan marriage meant to share or rule a home till another was brought to rule or to quarrel; but this man, after the manner of the Frank, had said alone and for ever! And Miriam, like many another maid of Europe, never doubted that it would be so. Therefore, being free of guile, or just as free as

those can be that have no other weapon, she looked up into David's face and put her hand in his. Whereon that young man did something quite unknown to Miriam's conception of courtship. He moved the light veil aside and kissed her twice, once on the forehead and once on the lips. On the forehead for respect, and the lips for love, since 'the love that is purest and sweetest has a kiss of desire on the lips.' All of which lay strictly outside the proper curriculum of courtship as revealed by old Amah.

And all the while the *shikara* paddled easily down the stream past the rows and rows of little lamps that flickered along the housetops and the plinths, and were reflecting a thousand times in the slowly rolling Jhelum. Past other boats beautifully illuminated, and great rice barges fifteen feet in the sheer that loomed all the blacker for a row of lights on their lofty lumbering stern. Past, too, the latticed verandahs that overhung the water, past the temples in which the great bronze conches brayed out the hour of worship. Past the mosques whence the *muezzin* again insisted, "Prayer is better than sleep! Prayer is better than sleep!" as if any one had any intention of sleeping and very few of praying at that hour, at any rate. Then perhaps because Gul Jan was forgetful and thoughtless, or perhaps because he was very wise and knew the ways of *sahibs*, the *shikara* ran close in, under the gloom of the plinths, within the glare of the lamps, seeing and unseen, and glided down under the great piles of the bridges and past all the bands and musicians and laughing chattering crowds, till half the night might have passed away, while whispered the wind and murmured the water.

But there is a limit to all things, and when they had passed the last bridge, Gul Jan thought the limit had come.

"Where does your honour wish to go?"

"Why, to the city reception hall, of course, where the city merchants entertain His Excellency."

"We passed that five bridges ago."

"Oh, Gul Jan, you are careless. Why, His Excellency expects the Lady Miriam, who sits here patiently waiting for us to take her there."

"Whatever your honour orders shall be done swiftly. Oh, foolish rowers! about boat at once, and take the presence and the lady to where they would go."

Sometimes, as David remembered noticing before, the old orderly had a hint of banter in his respectful speech.

Back, therefore, upstream against the current under the illuminated bridges once again the *shikara* sped. But it is not hard for two lovers to lose themselves without being missed. Every one had thought the Lady Miriam was with other ladies behind the grille. Salabat Khan had thought she was with the ladies, and they had thought she was with him. Only Yar Khan's eyes closed a shade more than usual. And she—oh, she was quite clever enough to take advantage of that, and then amid the glare and festivities, lost ken of the immortal hour in the *shikara* till once again she sat in the stern sheets of a boat, on the way back to the palace.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GROVES OF ASHTAROTH

MIRIAM sat in her own boat following in the wake of her brothers and his Begums. It was a long row back against the current, and the rowers were chanting as they swung their paddles. The short, quick stroke changed now and again to a long, steady one, as the head boatman changed the chant. The rowers paddling on the bow side chanted to those on the other, who answered back, "*Allah pahunchāëga! Khūda ka m rzi. Allah pahunchāëga. Khūda ka mārzi.*" "God will bring us there, if it be His will. God will bring us there, if it be His will." A short and quick stroke, "*Allah pahunchāëga! Allah pahunchāëga!*" changing to a long stroke, "*Kūdūm dūrāz! Kūdūm dūrāz!*" and the paddle dipped deep into the muddy Jhelum and the boat leapt to the changed stroke. But the crowd of returning boats and sight-seers rowing up and down was great. The pace had to slow down, and Miriam's boat was separated from the rest of the viceregal party. Shortly above the fifth bridge there was a jam and the head boatman turned aside by another canal that led towards the Garden of Chenars. Here, however, the press seemed no clearer, after proceeding half a mile it was not even possible to turn. "Fool that I am!" said Kashmiru the head boatman, aloud. "Fool that I

am. I have forgotten that this is the Feast of Spring, and that the women go to the temple of Mahadeo."

"Without doubt," chorused the rowers, "we, too, had forgotten, not being Hindus small shame to us. What ken should the sons of Islam have of such things?"

There they lied in their hearts, for each one knew that his forbears had been converted to Islam at the swords' point, and that they cherished, half unwittingly, it is true, many memories of the old religion. Probably the wives of one or two were actually taking part in the worship of the spirit of nativity. Sons were needed, and if Islam would not help the old gods might. It is ever thus in Hindostan.

Miriam heard Kashmiru's ejaculation, and called him. "Where are we, Kashmiru? When did you leave the river? I did not notice."

"I turned up here, Lady, to escape the crowd of boats on the big river, meaning to turn round by the canal of the waterlilies. But here we are jammed in by many boats, and I had forgotten that this is the night that the Hindu women attend at the temple of Mahadeo, a curse on them for their idolatry, and I cannot turn yet nor stop."

Miriam had often heard of the festival, of the mysteries and idolatries connected therewith. She had some feeling of curiosity, and also of horror and dread, since Islam abhors idols and saturnalia. Old Amah drowsed with her head on her knees outside the curtains of Miriam's awning.

"Amah, come here! Come here, I say! Do you know where we are? We are jammed in a stream of Hindu women going by boat to the temple of Mahadeo. It is the night of the Festival of Spring."

Old Amah stirred herself. Here was something unexpected, and quite out of her ordinary mental horizon.

"The Lady Miriam ought not to be here."

"The Lady Miriam knows that quite well. The Lady Miriam also wants to see something of the crowd. Did you ever go, Amah?"

Now, once, many years ago, Amah had been slave to a wealthy Hindu's wife. Amah had gone with her mistress.

"The Lady Miriam must not go, His Excellency would never forgive her. It is no place for a Mussulmani."

"I know that, Amah, but here we are and we cannot help seeing something of it." Miriam turned to Kashmiru. "Send a man to the palace to see if we are missed, and if so, to say that we are kept back by the crowd of boats. If we are not missed, he had better say nothing."

Kashmiru did as he was bid, and the boat paddled on with the crowd. From behind came up a long gaily-lit boat, the rowers singing merrily. To avoid them Kashmiru turned his steering paddle inwards just as they were alongside a row of sunken stakes, whence the recent floods had carried away a pier. Rip r-r-rip went the side planking below the water, and Miriam's boat filled with water. Just as she had realized what had happened, the shining boat, with the singing crew drew alongside, and a silver voice said, "Jump in here, lady, quick, or you'll be in the water. Steady, Muhamdu, don't you see that the Begum's boat is sinking. Steady!"

Muhamdu shouted to his crew, who backwatered, while the lady of the boat dragged Miriam over her gunwale, and after her poor dripping old Amah.

Kashmiru swore again, and his crew dragged the half sunken boat to the bank. Miriam called to him.

"Come with me, Kashmiru, with two rowers; the remainder stay on the bank by our boat."

Muhamdu, the head *mhanji* of the new-comers' boat, turned her stern to the shore to allow Miriam's men to come aboard, which they did, carrying their paddles, while Miriam, whose toes only had got wet, entered the curtained awning in which sat the owner who had come to her assistance, and had also been the cause of the accident. Miriam expected to see the wife of some rich Hindu merchant or Brahmin pundit of the city going to the festival, a mirror of decorum save on an occasion of license such as she understood this to be. Through the waving curtains, however, the light from the *chirags* flickering on the gunwales by the prow, shone on a figure clothed more glitteringly than a Hindu matron. The same light showed to the owner of the silver voice, the look of some surprise, or rather the turn of the half-veiled head, and said—

"Whom have I had the pleasure of assisting?"

"I am a lady from the Shergarhi, of an officer's family, and you?"

"I, Lady, am Azizun the dancer . . . are you ashamed to be assisted by me?"

Miriam was for the moment taken aback. Not only had she by the merest chance got separated from her own party, and become part of a procession of Hindu women going to a saturnalian festival that all of her creed abhorred, which all the same she had a mind to see the beginning, but now by untoward chance she was sitting cheek by jowl with one of the most notorious dancing women in the province. She, like every one else, knew Azizun by name, for the *zenanas*, even the inner seclusion, know all the evil gossip of the outside world, else would life, indeed, be dull, and she knew also that the dancer held high sway over the Lord Altamish. Further, she had never inquired, and had no desire to know. Therefore, it was not surprising that she should show perturbation

at the strange company in which chance had thrown her.

Then Azizun did a wise thing. All the devil in her prompted jest and jibe and a high horse, which would have made Miriam summon Kashmiru and insist on landing on the mud bank. She refrained, and a softer strain took possession of the hour. She laid her richly ringed hand on Miriam's arm, and said with a hint of falter in her voice—

"Turn not from me, Lady; I am what fate has made me. I rule princes, but am outcaste, yet was not born so."

Miriam knew well that ninety per cent. of the dancer grade have been born of a long line of matriarchal forebears of the same trade, but here was a hint of tragedy.

"Tell me your story, Azizun. But stop, where are we? How can I get a boat?"

"Lady, I am going to the great festival of Mahadeo, not to pray, for I have no right, and am Mussulmani born; I go to see the *tamasha*.* You can't get a boat. It will take us more than half an hour to get to the sunken temple in this press. I can send you back in this boat either to the Shergarhi or till you can find another. After the women have all arrived at the temple the canal will be clear."

"I must avail myself of your offer, unless Kashmiru can find a boat at the temple stairs. Tell me, then, while we wait, your story. You say you are a Mussulmani."

"Aye, and Kashmiri, too. Well I remember my father's hut on the hillside above the Sinde, and the long-haired goats with the big horns that I used to watch, while my mother would plait my hair. In the summer we took our flocks up to Sonamarg, and I played with my brothers and the goats in the beautiful

* Show.

marg * covered in flowers. Often, often I try and remember more."

The break in Azizun's voice increased, and Miriam grew interested.

"What happened then to take you away?"

"One day in early autumn there came by some Afghan slave merchants; we were all alone in the hillside, and they carried me off, and one of my brothers too. My father did not know and could not have helped if he had. I hardly remember what happened, but I only know that I was brought with other children, mostly girls, from the Siah Posh Kafirs to Istaliff, and kept there. I can remember playing with other children and being not unkindly treated, till one day we were taken to the Kabul slave market and sold. An old Kazilbash bought me, and I grew up a maid in his household in Ghuzni. I was taught to sing and dance, and my master took a great fancy to me. I was given the best apartments, and all the women hated me. But what cared I for such a life, with an old white-bearded man! He had a son who was a captain of horse in the Emperor's service. I saw him first one day in our walled garden, and we had many meetings. I cared not for him, but anywhere to get out from such a cage—I, a Kashmiri girl of the hills! He was going south to the Punjab, and asked me to go with him, and climbing the fig-tree by the river wall at the end of my master's house, he lifted me with ropes over the wall, delighted at stealing his father's best slave. We rode south together, but he was killed at Lahore, and I was sold again, to find myself in the slave harem of a Mogul noble at Delhi. Him I hated too, though I became his favourite dancer, and even danced for the Emperor to see. That was before they blinded him."

* Meadow.

By this time Miriam was watching the narrator with intense interest. She knew enough of life in the North to know how true the story might well be, and Amah had told her many a similar tale, but here before her was an actual victim of the lawless life of Central Asia.

"I now rule a Toork noble as I ruled that Mogul and the old Kuzilbash, but only once have I loved a man, Lady. He was a Frank"—at which Miriam's attention deepened. "He came I know not whence, to the court at Delhi, and I danced before him. That night I know not how, but these Franks are daring, an old woman brought a message that if I would come with him he would get me away. I sent word to say that I hated my present master, and all about him and would come at once. That very morning, by means I have never yet understood, the Keeper of the *Zenana* came to me and touched me while I slept. I expected a summons to await on my lord, with my zithar, but was surprised to follow the passage to the main gate that I had not seen for two years. The gate opened, and a bullock cart with curtains was outside. I found myself driven out into the country, the open country that I used to love, and eventually came to some tents in a palm grove. I was led in to find the young Frank I had seen at the nautch. He asked if I was ready to follow him, and if so could I sit a horse at once, as they must be fifty miles away from Delhi by nightfall. I would go anywhere or do anything to live in the open, and away we rode in an hour's time, with his fifty troopers behind him, to seek service of Scindiah. We had a happy year together, and then, alas, he was killed in a fight with the Moguls. Dying in his own camp he gave me all he had, and I took to being a dancer on my own account, training others likewise. Now you see me here,

mistress of a Toork noble, for want of some one better : spurn me if you like. You know the sort of life I lead, and how I once minded goats in a Kashmir valley."

There were tears in the dancing girl's eyes at the end of the brief outline of her story. It was probably true, and Miriam knew by repute of how the Afghan and Uzbek slave-dealers raided and stole far and wide, and how the Mussalmani dancer and courtesan was often the victim of such. A girl from the hills of Kashmir ever fetched a high price in the markets of the East. The lass who 'minded goats upon a hill, sing hey, sing ho, a grassy hill,' might rise to heights of infamy or even heights of honour through the medium of the slave-dealer's yard. Poor Azizun had come to power and infamy instead of power and honour, and indeed it was the more likely fate. The girl from the hillside whose 'hair was black and bright and wild, sing hey, sing ho, so bright and wild,' ought to have been left to live her contented life there, and not taught with bitter teaching to prey on men. Miriam wondered if girls were sold as slaves in the English provinces; and who the young Frank was that had carried off Azizun, then turning swiftly to the dancer as a wave of sympathy welled up within her—

"I believe it all, Azizun, and, indeed, you have had a sad hard life. I will never turn from you, at least in my thoughts, for we shall not meet again."

"Ah, Lady," returned poor Azizun, still in her soft mood, "it is seldom enough that such as I get a kind word or a kind thought; we fight for our own hand, and men and women are against us."

And the two sat awhile in silence while the rowers paddled on.

"*Allah pāhūnchāēga! Khūda ka mārzi! Allah Pāhūnchāēga! Khūda ka mārzi!*"

While they sat Miriam was turning over in her mind the story she had just heard, and wondering all the time how she could best get back to the palace.

Outside, Kashmiru and Muhamdu were carrying on a low-voiced discussion. Kashmiru soon discovered who the inmate of the curtained awning was, and began by expressing his disgust. Muhamdu, however, was able to remind him of the time when he, too, was head *mhanji* to a lady of the same persuasion, and Kashmiru changed his tone. What the Governor was likely to say or do if he knew what had happened was a much more important matter, with which Muhamdu could frankly sympathize. Looked at from an orthodox point of view, it was a mess, and the best solution that the latter could see was that when Azizun landed, Muhamdu and his crew should row Miriam back, and merely appear as the crew and boat that had been able to assist the palace lady.

Azizun was not the woman to remain in silence; and soon recovered from her unwonted sadness and the effects of her recital of her story.

"The Lady is going to the festival."

"Certainly not, Azizun; I must get back to the palace."

"It will be some time after we get to the temple ghaut before the canal will be clear. If you will trust me I will show you the idol worshippers at their opening ceremonies."

"It is no fit place for a Mussalmani."

"It is not, except as a spectator of other folks' evil. If you come with me I will take care that you only see that which is fitting. Azizun knows it all, but will not take the lady of the palace. It is not fit for her."

For the moment Miriam bridled at the suggestion of patronage, implied, but quickly saw that it was far preferable to an assumption that she might fitly

be present. Then the excitement of the occasion was considerable. By a stream of favouring chances she was in a position to view in the hands of a competent guide one of the forbidden sights. The spirit of adventure stirred within her. Already that night a new world had opened. She would also explore for a while another side passage.

"I will come, Azizun, with you for a while, if you promise to help me away, when I want to leave. It is not meet that I should see any of those doings that are said to take place as the festival proceeds."

"Lady, I will see that you do not. We will see the women pray in the outer temples of Mahadeo, the women who want big, strong sons, and fear they will have daughters to dower; the women who have no sons to take their husband's ashes to the Holy Ganges, and close their dying lips."

The worship of Hinduism in its popular and unphilosophical forms, takes chiefly the shape of worship of that great creative force of nature, the great spring of the world, the flocks in their abundance, the fields in their fertility, the trees in all their blossom, so fully amplified in early Kashmir, the whole world obeying the great injunction of nature to be fruitful and multiply. To the simple world and the simple mind of a Hindu people, ever present is the tragedy of the barren woman and the unwanted wife. So once a year do Hindu women proceed, as did those of Egypt and the stately Roman matron, to worship and to fall before the emblems of the forces of nature. Then, since human folk have strong and wild passions when civilization fails them, there come strange tales of frenzy from the inner scenes of the women's festivals, to which no male save the officiating priests may be present. Shorn of its animal side it is but the worship of eternity and of "Death trod under a fair girl's feet."

So towards the sunken temple of Mahadeo, that for half the year and more lies deserted, sped the boats, and with them Miriam the maiden and Azizun the courtesan. The boats jammed at the temple *ghat* and the torches flickered and the *chirags* leapt, as laughing, chattering women bundled out of their curtained boats and scurried from among the crowd of boatmen to the seclusion of the awning alley, which ran through the arch of carved grey stone. Away in the depths of a grove of trees temple bells were clanging, and conches brayed to the blowing of some stout-lunged priest. The crowd of hurrying women carried Miriam and Azizun along, the former clutching at the dancer's arm. They soon found themselves jammed within the dark, cool entrance of a low vaulted stone temple. The damp on the stones shone with the flicker of the *chirags*, and the air was heavy with scent of marigold and white *chāmpāk* and the sickly aroma of the burning incense. Through the darkness and gloom that the lights only heightened, loomed the great figure of 'the God of the sensuous fire,' and around a flicker from a lamp would show the weird, unholy carvings, the 'symbols of death and of man's desire,' the organs of birth and the circlets of bones; while Miriam of the clean creed of Islam shuddered and gripped her guide tighter.

Round the figure of the god, faint in the gloom, bowed and bent the figures of kneeling women, swaying to the deep, low chant that came from none knew whence. It rose and fell and swelled again, till the swaying forms murmured responses or the sharp cry of some woman, uplifted with hysterical emotion, broke in on the cadence. Behind the giant figure in the depths of shadow, amid the loose loves carved on the temple stones, the inner recesses stretched away in blackness unlit by the fitful flames. In vain

Miriam's eyes and thoughts tried to penetrate the imagined mysteries beyond. The volume of the chant gained intensity, and the joint will of the multitude was asserting itself till the suggestion of savage, primitive instinct became all-pervading. The heavy, scented atmosphere vibrated with the will and desires of the many.

"Take me away, Azizun! Take me out of this!" gasped Miriam, and she felt herself drawn down some side cloister away from the obsession of the untamed spirit of female force. A cool, soft breeze struck her heated cheek, and the whispered sound of the west wind's breath sighed through the cloister. The temple chanting sounded afar off, and a soft light shone before them. A mild, clear voice spoke.

"What seek my sisters in the cloistered cell?"

Azizun whispered, "'Tis the ascetic *swami* of the garden shrine. He has been in the garden, men say, for fifty years and more. Answer him. Answer him. Say we seek escape from the crowd within. Nay! Stay! They say he is a seer. Ask what the future may have in store."

"We seek to escape from the crowd and heat of the temple."

"Rest awhile, my sisters, surely it is well to rest, and to leave the whirl of human life. Seek ye peace on the road untold? 'Tis hard to come by. You do well to break away from the ignorant crowds within."

"Can we get out? We are not shut in?"

"Surely ye can get out. Shall I lead you to the water's edge?"

"We crave leave to rest, but are afraid of the noise and heat of the temple."

"There is nothing to fear here. It is but the thought and knowledge of man and woman that you heard.

Do you fear the secret tale of the emblems? Do you seek God's purpose or trace His plans?"

"We would know something of our life to come."

"Ah! that is ever man's desire, and little may be revealed. Each age is a dream that is passing, and sufficient unto the hour are the happenings thereof. What lies in your own minds, or in the minds of others regarding yourselves, *that*, perhaps, I can help you realize. Come with me!"

The *swami* led the two out through a side porch into an open court, where the sounds from the temple did not reach and the babel of the rowers without came but faint on the night air. Straight overhead Orion shone clear and Auriga twinkled across to Gemini, while the world slept to the wind's crooning. The sweet smell of white rose and narcissus softened the air, and the west wind whispered again. Before a small shrine the *swami* stopped and bade them enter, and then it was that Miriam recognized the memory that had been haunting her these ten minutes past. The voice was as the voice of Jean Armande du Plessis. Soft and kind and dead to the world, with ever the trend to things of the spirit, the voices of men at peace.

Once again they found themselves before a Hindu god, but this time their gaze fell, not on the horrors of creation incarnate, but on the stately brow and folded hands of Indra. A very different lesson emanated from the black marble presentment . . . peace in the uttermost borders and strength on a road untold. A small fire burned before the deity.

"Sister, here before the mighty Indra I will unfold something of a Brahmin's knowledge. Look now into the fire. That which you may see is for your own information or for ours as well, as your heart may choose. Now look!"

Miriam gazed into the fire, which slowly seemed to

rise and spread to a sheet of blue flame, clear and steady as a mirror. And in this mirror Miriam saw David Fraser, not as she had known him that evening, she had yet no time to ponder on the day's happenings ; but as she loved to think of him, the day he rode through the city, at the head of his procession, for all the world to see. She remained silent and the *swami* spoke again.

"You have seen that which your own thoughts frame. Now look again."

And there came another vision. This time in a garden by the shores of a lake a figure of an Afghan paced up and down. His face was gnarled and scared, and the beetling brows were knit in thought.

"Azizun ! Azizun ! I see the Afghan who was with the Lord Altamish that day we rode through the city from the Hari Parbat. I know him by the cleft in his forehead. He walks in a garden by the lake shore."

"You have seen, sister, some one whose thoughts are bent on you."

Miriam gripped Azizun's arm again in sudden fear. Why should she see in the flames this strange, fierce man ?

"Who is he, Azizun ? Why does he think of me ?"

"It must be the Afghan *Sirdar* Daoud Shah ; but why he should think of you I know not. But stay ! Who are you ?"

"I am Miriam, the sister of His Excellency Salabat Khan."

And then Azizun cried aloud, "Why, oh why did I bring you here ? I must take you home : come away. Oh, sir ! show us the shore and help us find our boat."

"Sisters, be not troubled. You see but the thoughts of men, or your own free thoughts ; but, come, I will show you the shore. Forget if the phantoms have

prophesied woe. Here in this garden none may molest you. Come again when you seek peace and rest."

And he led them by courts and plinths to the water-side. Azizun ran towards the boats, calling Muhamdu, to find happily that her boat had pushed out clear of the crowd and was tethered near by, the water muttering under the prow and the rowers asleep on the bank. The frightened Miriam hurried after her, forgetting to bid the *swami* farewell as he stood, tall and thin and serene, his faded eyes watching and wondering as she sped.

"Put out all the lights, Muhamdu, and pull for the Shergarhi. Is the Lady Miriam's head *mhanji* there?"

Kashmiru's deep voice attested his presence, and Miriam heard the note of relief in it.

In silence and darkness they paddled past the jam of boats at the *ghat* of the sunken temple down the now empty canal and out again into the open Jhelum, to find at last the palace steps silent and deserted and Miriam's own *mhanji* awaiting them.

"*Huzoor!* His Excellency was delayed at a fire in the city, and coming home late thought you had arrived and gone in. I told him all was well."

Silently Miriam stepped out of the boat, and turning to Azizun whispered—

"All is well, and I thank you for your care. It was all my doing that I went to the temple, and you brought me out safely."

"Good-night, Lady, and remember that if Miriam, the Governor's sister, ever wants aid from the broken cowrie of seven markets, from Azizun the dancer, she has but to send for it."

Up the steps and past the drowsy sentry, too sleepy even to wonder why ladies roamed so late, Miriam sped to her own apartments.

CHAPTER XXII

TROUBLE ON THE BORDER

WHEN Daoud Shah meant mischief in Upper India, mischief there usually was. Hill tribes are queer restless things, chiefly because hills breed many and feed few. They, or at any rate their young men, are ever ready to listen to any suggestion for inroad and raid on their neighbours. When that suggestion comes from so expert a stirrer of men as our wandering Afghan of the Beni-Israel and his chosen assistants, there was nothing to be expected but trouble prompt and widespread. To each and all of the tribes Daoud Shah had sent the message most likely to disturb them. To the Black Mountain he had sent word of intended foreign colonies in Hazara. To the Sayads of Khagan he wrote of their alleged claim to the Lolab valley, and the views of the Toork faction on that same subject, and how the Lord Altamish intended that they should have the land. To Tangir and Darel away in the Trans-Indus Kohistan, he sent word that the Afghan governor was about to invade Tangir, and levy the old forgotten tribute of maidens.

Then to the Black Mountain tribes of the Sons of Joseph, he betook himself in person, close on the heels of his messengers, and arrived in time to find the full tribal jirgahs sitting in full-thing on his first message.

Now a full *jirgah* of a large tribe is very important and not unlike the old Full-Thing of the Anglo-Saxons. Each of the clans and sub-clans had sent their representatives with a goodly following, so that when the *jirgah* itself sits, it is surrounded at a respectful distance with a ring of clansmen, every one armed to the teeth partly out of respect to the meeting, but chiefly in case of accidents. Accidents often happen. The clans and sub-clans have quarrels, and these are often fought out on the way to and from the gathering. It is not unknown in the case of heated arguments for a member to fire his bell-mouthed pistol into his neighbour's side.

Outside the great ring in which the elders and representatives sit, the tribal musicians will be in attendance, their *doles* throbbing to the pulse of the meeting.

Right into the midst of this one morning in early June then, rode Daoud Shah himself, attended by two of his following, and dismounting outside the ring strode into the centre and called out the peace greeting, "*Salaam Alek*," to which came back the answer, "*Alekum Salaam*." The mass of the *jirgah* sat in some astonishment. Who was the assured stranger who thus strode into their meeting? It was a striking scene. The elders sat on a grassy knoll outside a village, with an outer circle of clansmen. The tall loop-holed mud towers of the village were covered with women and children looking down on the gathering. Slightly below the village lay a level piece of cultivated ground, in which the young maize and buckwheat showed a vivid green. Walnut, almond and peach trees flourished dotted among the fields, with here and there an outlying homestead, each with its mud tower also. The said towers had solid mud and stone bases that could not be undermined, and the only access to an elevated doorway was by ladder, so that once inside

the enemy could be defied. Round the little valley rose the rugged hills now covered with violet and tulip and the Prophet's flower. Above them rose the slopes of the higher mountains where blue pine and deodar and silver birch stretched to the snow line. A few stacks of the dried stalks of last year's maize remaining from the cattle's winter store added another colour to the picture, and the ensemble was a well-enough setting to an embryo parliament. Unfortunately, that parliament, despite the beauty of its setting, was discussing war and the making of war for the mere fun and lust of it. Here and there an elder had protested, but the spirit of the tribe was evidently in favour of it. The crops promised well and could be left to themselves and the women. There was plenty of ammunition in hand from the last war. Neighbours in the Trans-Indus were friendly, and all seemed propitious for a jaunt over into the Kashmir domain.

Matters were at this stage when Daoud Shah himself put in an appearance, with the greeting of peace, and the *jirgah* demanded who the new-comer might be. Three of the elders at once rose. Daoud Shah could be no stranger to those who had seen a generation of the Great Anarchy. He had been mixed up in too many rebellious risings and invasions for that. One of the elders extended the hands of greeting to the Afghan. He had been to Kabul and to Lahore, and had ridden in the Afghan ranks to Agra. He and the others well knew the power and reach and uncanny influence that the man had so long wielded, and hastened to receive him suitably. The subject then before the *jirgah* was explained to him, and he was asked to seat himself. He remained for a while a listener, but before long an opportunity offered itself, and he sprang to his feet to urge on them the wisdom and advisability of an incursion into the Lolab.

"The beautiful valley of Kashmir which your fathers used to share is yours by right. The province is groaning under a Kabuli government. Will you stand idle in your bare valleys when you can have milk and honey for the asking? Come and take tribute of Kashmir, free tribes, men of the Black Mountain, *jowans* * of the Kala Taka. Help us eject these tyrants from Kabul and take your reward. Or if you prefer it, go raid and disturb the near valleys for your own hand. Men say in the bazaars of Srinagar that this precious Governor is going to levy a tribute of maids from you, as Imam-ud-Deen did fifty years ago! There are greybeards here who remember that."

And here the *jirgah* groaned and their arms clashed. "Come with me, *sirdars* and clansmen of the Black Mountain. Send your *lashkars*, † Men of the Hassan Khel, Men of the Achakzai, or shall I say Women of the Achakzai and Hassan Khel! The game is a great one, and you of the race of the Euzufzai can play it. Your fathers did. *Sirdar* Khunrez Khan here did; as I have seen with my own eyes."

And again the *jirgah* clashed and the young men shouted. Daoud Shah burst out into viking vein.

"Ohé! Wolves of the Achakzai. Ohé! Warriors of the Sons of Joseph. Sharpen your stabbing knives! Thrice prime your *jezails*! Carry off cattle for your wives and silk for your betrothed! Over the mountains and down to the valleys. Role and throb the *doles*. Skirl the *surmai*! ‡ Who speaks of peace? Fie! Fie! Greybeards must die!"

And Daoud Shah, the man of blood and mystery, sat down well pleased with his day's work, while the young men shouted again. For the moment the *jirgah* broke up into groups. It seemed vain for the elders to

* Young men.

† Armies.

‡ A reed chanter.

counsel moderation. Who cared for prudence! One large knot of elders talked together, and with three aged white-bearded *moolahs* * and one younger one, with dark set brows and thin, tightly closed lip. A fanatic of fanatics. The elders, laymen, and priests argued for prudence. Daoud Shah braced himself for another effort.

"With the permission of the honourable *jirgah*, I would speak again."

His rasping high-pitched voice rose over the babel of tongues, and the groups broke away to reform the great circle.

"O men of Islam. Your *Moolahs* here say they are against war, and that it is not lawful for Islam to war with Islam. I tell you tribesmen and clans, men of this mighty clan, that this Kabuli Governor of Kashmir and his followers are not true Mussalmans. They oppress the faithful, they favour the infidel dogs of Hindu traders, who batten on the poor savings of the followers of the blessed Prophet. So do they oppress the faithful that I swear to you that to make inroad into their territory is almost *Jihad*, a war of religion! Glory for all, and Heaven for those who bleed! Salabat Khan is *rafzi*, a heretic, who consorts with a Christian *padré*, and even worships at the shrine of the Nazarene Iswi, near the mosque of Shah Hamadan. Justice for the faithful clansmen! Strike for the faith! *Din Din! Fateh Muhammad!* (The Faith! The Faith! Victory to Mahomed!)"

Then the fanatic-faced priest with the tight-closed lips sprang up, and cried—

"*Din! Din! Fateh Muhammad!*" and began to chant the *Kalima*, the creed of Islam. "*La illah ha! Il illah ho! o Muhammad rasul il illah!*" ("There

* Priests.

is no God but the one God, and Mahomed is His Prophet.")

Whereon the whole *jirgah* shouted as one man, "*La illah ha! il illah ho! La illah ha! il illah ho!*" till the hillsides re-echoed with the *ililillah*, and the chant changed to the deeper, "Glory for all, and Heaven for those who bleed." An old *moolah*, with a raw red-dyed beard, danced out beating a tomtom with both hands till hearts and minds rang with fervour. There is no roll of drum like to the drum ecclesiastic.

Then Khunrez Khan *malik*, as the shouting died away, announced that according to the wish of the tribe for a holy war, the *lashkars* would assemble at the head of the valley, the afternoon of the day after next, and every man was to bring a goatskin with five days' rations therein. After which, with one more shout of "*Din! Din!*" the *jirga* melted away.

But how Daoud Shah managed to present a proposal for a most unprovoked attack on a neighbour for pure love of rapine and gain, as an enthusiastic righteous war, is a marvel to this day, only to be accounted for by the mysterious inhuman influence that the man seemed to wield.

After some further conversation with Khunrez Khan it was arranged that the tribal *lashkar* should appear by the evening of the fifth day at the head of the Lolab Valley, and in the passes above Gurais. Daoud Shah, then scarcely waiting to partake of food, rode away towards Chilas to still further disturb the countryside. But he had so succeeded in imposing his will on the clansmen that the preparations for the inroad went on apace without him. The elders still regretted, as elders will. To them war and rapine had lost much of its savour. Dead men and burning hayricks were wasteful features on a countryside, especially if it happened to be their own. They knew well what

retaliatory raids meant, and were by no means sure that the power of the government of Kashmir was so low as had been represented. But the young men ever jostle the elders, and Daoud Shah had the power to charm. So war it was to be, for weal or for woe.

Far below the Black Mountain in the Jhelum valley, Altamish and his myrmidons were seeking to reap when the crop should be ready. The Toork nobles sat ready watching for a sign, and agents busily endeavoured to sow discontent in men's minds and especially in the minds of any of Salabat Khan's troops. The insinuator, the agitator, is always a danger; well-calculated remarks easily produce some fancied grievance. Some of Altamish's agents were men of acute and subtle brain-power. Mysterious stories were spreading in the bazaars of oppressions and abductions, tales of children stolen to sacrifice at the new cannon foundry, or in the foundations of fortresses, and the like. The Governor was contemplating fresh taxation. The Emperor at Kabul was displeased with him and intended to recall him, the Frank officers had insulted the *moolahs*, and every other vain yet restless tale seemed rife.

Among the Toork nobles Wali Dad had been especially active. The old feeling was thoroughly stirred and petitions were sent to Kabul to have a Toork governor appointed, and each and all of the *sirdars* were asked if they would share in a joint enterprise to place Altamish in the Governor's chair should opportunity offer. A good deal of which came round to Yar Khan's ears, without his being able to locate its origin at all definitely, however-so-much he might suspect it.

The day after Daoud Shah had disappeared, Altamish himself decided to pay a visit *incognito*, accompanied only by Wali Dad, to the *salon* of Allah Visayah, and see what that lady might be able to tell him either of

Palace plans or the feelings of the soldiery, in both of which she was well versed. Duly warned by Wali Dad of his proposed visit, she had got rid of her morning visitors, and with only a female attendant waited his advent. The best tobacco and the best rosewater were ready in the *hugas*, which stood resplendent in red embroidered mouthpieces and lacquered metal stands. Altamish climbed the narrow stairs that marred the best of Indian houses with some difficulty, and subsided into the rose silk Bokhara cushions out of wind and short of temper.

However, the Begum understood the first essentials of her business, and that was to induce good temper, and the excellent *huga* duly offered soon achieved this. Altamish sat and drew at his mouthpiece and was mollified. His visit being one of inquiry, he was at pains to start various topics in the hope of coming by way of chance on some of the clues he searched for.

"I hear that there was some sort of a rising at the Hari Parbat while His Excellency was away. Did you hear much of it in the city?"

"We heard, my Lord, that the *Kommadan* of the Regiment of Victory was killed. He was hung, my Lord."

"That was very sad."

"Very."

This was not very promising. Something more leading was necessary.

"Why did they hang him?"

"For trying to take possession of the fort for some other chief."

"What made him do it?"

"How should I know, my Lord?"

"I should gladly pay a good deal to find out if there is anything of the kind going on now."

"Surely my Lord should know better than any one else."

"I, woman? I care little enough about intrigues, save that a wise man likes to know the inner workings of all things. I can make it worth your while to find out."

"I can do a great deal, as my Lord knowest, if it is worth my while. It was not my fault that the *Kommadan* was hung. He was a friend of mine, and ever treated me well."

"I know, I know. It was a great pity, but many people were weary of Afghan rule, and were anxious to rise. He did but misjudge the occasion. Now what I will make it worth your while to do, is to find out who there be now among the *kommadans* of the regiments and forts who are weary of Salabat Khan. That is information I really should pay well for. I want to know who there be who will join another rising against those Afghans?"

"I know three already, and can find out what their present ideas are, but I don't wish to see more of my friends swinging on gate-tops."

"I think I can promise that that shall not happen again. What I want is to get the fort *kommadans* in the valley to rise against the Governor if a sign be given."

And then Allah Visayah, ever eager for money and more money, promised that she would do her best to obtain the information that night, or by the next night at latest. After which Altamish pulled at his *huga* in silence, while the lady twanged her zithar softly. To such effect did her promises and her music move the Toork that a bag of fifty *ashrafis* * were left in her ample lap.

* Gold coins.

CHAPTER XXIII

WAR AND RUMOURS OF WAR

THE tale of woe from the border soon penetrated to Srinagar. Hot-foot from the Lolab came messengers to say that the tribesmen of the Black Mountain had marched over the passes into the head of the valley, had burnt villages, were carrying off slaves, cattle and women, and had in most cases overcome the local *khassadars* (militia). The few Kabuli settlers had been obliged to fall back and the Kashmiri villagers were flying for their lives. From the beautiful valley of Gurais came similar tidings. A *lashkar* from Tangir and Darel and Chilas was carrying off sheep from both valley and uplands, having marched over the Burzil and Kamri passes to join a party from the Black Mountain who had come up the Kishenganga. The small mud fort in the Gurais Valley near Kanzilwan was invested. A small detachment of Afghan soldiery reinforced by local *khassadars* was holding out against a determined attack. Daoud Shah's evil influence had spread the fiery cross against his fellow-countrymen with a vengeance! A wind blew and the people with it, as people will when some unknown spirit moves them.

Salabat Khan was no loiterer. He could not have held his own in the Duranni Empire at the time of the Great Anarchy had he been otherwise. He

first sent off *cossids* to call out all the *khassadars* of the districts adjoining those threatened. Then he called for his minister and Major David Fraser, his new-found master of horse, who hurried post-haste to the Shergarhi. The Governor demanded a statement of the strength and location of his forces. Yar Khan produced an exact tally. There were present in Srinagar the following :—

The Body Guard *Rissalah*.

Ferassa *Sahib's Rissalah*.

The Regiment of Victory, 400 bayonets.

The Regiment of Lightning, 100 bayonets.

Artillery, 3 mountain guns carried a-ponytop ;
2 small mortars, ditto.

Away in the frontier posts and forts were the whole of the *Lal Kurta* * Regiment, while 300 men of the Regiment of Lightning were absent up the valley, collecting revenue. One way and another perhaps a thousand *khassadars* armed with matchlock and knife were scattered about the valley. About 200 pack ponies and 100 camels would also be immediately available. The Toork nobles and Afghan landowners should also be able to turn out 400 or 500 men.

The foregoing was an accurate *resumé* of resources, and Yar Khan argued that it would be as well to get the Toork retainers away with them rather than leave them unwatched in the country. But it was one thing to take stock of resources, and another to decide where to apply them. The enemy had overrun two different parts. Where should the Kashmir force strike ? The temptation to separate the forces was great ; to send some of the Kashmir troops to the Lolab, the remainder to Gurais. Against this Yar Khan protested. He had learnt the great lesson of

* Red coated.

war, in a bitter school. That lesson was as old as the world. It is to *concentrate at the decisive point*. So simple to enunciate! So difficult to put into practice! Where was the decisive point? A leading question, indeed, with an elusive answer. Yar Khan had one, however, for the old man was ever strong in council. In the Lolab there was a strong reliable body of *khassadars* to oppose the raiders, and whose advance they must eventually check. In Gurais, on the other hand, there were few, and those few beleaguered. To secure Gurais fort and release the garrison was clearly the right objective, and it must be done with all the available force. David supported Yar Khan entirely. His own war experience, both that of actual war as he had seen it with Sindiah, and as he had learnt it from his father's teaching, was clear enough. Concentrate at the decisive point; if possible, but at any rate concentrate to fight. That had been the teaching of Turenne and the Great King. To Gurais then! with all available men except the Lolab *khassadars* and one or two compulsory garrisons.

Salabat Khan was not the man to lose time when his mind was made up. To Gurais, then, to-morrow morning, the mounted troops by the lake-shore road to Bandipura, and the infantry to the same place by boat. David had now been admitted to his entire confidence, and it was a kindly hand that he put on the lad's shoulder, and said, as David was leaving for his cantonment—

"Now we shall see what the English training has done for these pet children of yours!"

It was midday ere David was fairly started for the shores of the Dhall Lake, and on his way he met the Lady Miriam a-horseback, returning from hawking quail, a *baz* * on right wrist. Behind her came Habib

* A species of hawk.

Ullah, who had been escorting her, with half a dozen retainers and huntsmen. Habib also held a *baz*, and two of the men behind had *bashas*.* Her ladyship was lightly veiled, and the glow and excitement of the chase was still on her.

David's heart stirred within him at meeting his lady love, full of memory of that never-to-be-forgotten evening on the night of the Festival of Spring, when the vague feelings that had so haunted him since he climbed beside Miriam up the slopes of the Pir Panjal, had sprung into their full meaning. And Miriam—Miriam, too, had suddenly known herself, in the same hour as man and maid so often do; and, like other maidens, was far less self-conscious over it than David. It was certainly not etiquette for him to stop to talk with a lady, especially with Habib Ullah in charge. He would salute her and her escort and pass along. But not so the Lady Miriam. Hers was an open soul that knew no guile. They had ridden together through the night and day of their adventure, and Habib knew that story, so she might very well stop the *Sahib*. She did so, and called to him gaily, with that proud note behind the timbre of her voice, that women use for those they conquer.

"Whither away so fast, Ferassa *Sahib*, that you cannot tarry to talk to me or the *Sirdar* here?"

Whereon David stopped and told her and Habib Ullah of the news from the tribal borders, and of the early start of the army. And as he told he remembered what had slipped his thoughts in the excitement of hearing the Governor's war plans. What was to become of Miriam if they failed? in whose ultimate charge could he leave her? and that feeling of responsibility, that men feel when they first realize what the burdens of a wife may mean, struck him chill.

* Another species of hawk.

But Miriam only clapped her hands till her sleepy old hawk woke up and tried to get loose. The new model army should go and show its worth, and her brother's government be more than ever justified!

"Oh, Habib Ullah Khan *Sahib*, your *rissalah* will go too, and the pack guns we have heard so much of, that that other *Sahib* is getting ready. I have heard so much, too, from His Excellency of your *rissalah*, and how good you have made it. Oh! I must see them all march out!"

Habib Ullah Khan was really a man of sterling character. He had accepted David heartily in the beginning, and listened contentedly to him in his hints and orders on cavalry training. He had seen without a spasm of jealousy, his troops improve each day in order and discipline, and he had conceived a deep and lasting friendship and devotion for David. David had fully reciprocated this feeling, and save in the matter of Miriam had now grown to confide in the Afghan most of his thoughts and troubles. But the matter of Miriam did not need confiding. Habib was the oldest of students of love and its ways. He had two dear good wives of his own at home in the Punjab, and he had a sweetheart or a light of love in every town he had frequented, and in many a village. Habib's heart was large, and, for all his licence, sound. He knew to differentiate between love as it should be and the love that appealed to his lighter nature. The signs of both phases of the sentiment were familiar to him. He quite well understood the situation between Miriam and David; it was a common theme in poetry if little known in practice. Therefore, that very staunch comrade in arms, as is the wont of such, after suitable reply to the lady, said—

"I will hurry on with my men to the ferry, and

get the horses in ; will you escort our lady down to the boat ? What also are your orders for the march ? ”

“ Your *rissalah* must meet me and the troops from the camp, at the village which lies a *kos* from the city, on the Bandipura road at nine in the morning. You can manage that ? ”

“ I can, *Sahib*. But what about food and forage ? ”

“ The *Wazir* has arranged to send it by boat to Bandipura, and I have ordered it for one night at the Shadipur *Tehsil*. ”

Whereon the cheery Habib waved his hand and rode off, leaving David to conduct Miriam down to the ferry-boat. They had not met again since the wonderful evening on the river, though the thoughts of both had dwelt lovingly on every detail. To Miriam's genuine nature there was nothing to conceal, and everything to rejoice at. Old Amah had been told in secrecy, and Amah, the romantic, had applauded and told the old tales of Persia of love, real love and romance, that had come to the thrice-blessed ladies in the poems. All was quite wonderful. There would be a splendid marriage and His Excellency would give the *Sahib* many *jaghirs*. But all was not quite such plain sailing as Amah prophesied. David himself had doubted whether he could immediately propose to the Governor for his sister's hand, or should wait till further service seemed likely to make him more indispensable to Salabat Khan. Then came the rumour of war, and the very occasion that seemed wanting was now likely to present itself.

As they rode silently together the same thoughts passed through their minds, and Miriam, through her veil, noted with swelling pride how well her lad sat his handsome horse, and how well the serious looks became him.

Then Miriam broke the silence. "What does my Lord think of the frontier trouble?"

"Nay! dearest lady mine, I know not what to think as yet. The trouble in itself is nothing; but I wish I knew if anything was behind it. Our Toork friends are sending horsemen with us, but I wish I could trust those that remain."

"What does my brother think?"

"I hardly know yet. He seems to feel that the frontier must be quieted at once, and we shall take all the men we can."

"Ah, dearest mine, you make me anxious, and now I know why women weep o' nights when their men folk ride out to war."

"War is war, lady mine, and each of us must bear our part. My mother wept, I well remember, when my father left us for the wars; but he returned safe and gained great praise and honour for his share. I shall return I hope with your brother's approbation, and feel I may make open proposal for your hand."

"Dear, dear! how the man runs on. You make sure that I will marry you at once then, sir?"

And David looked up in her face and laughed, a laugh that took all the care and thought out of his own brows, and made the world ring young.

"Lady mine, I shall carry you off like many a true Afghani before you, whether your brother wills it or no; and I will take my *rissalah* back to General Lake Sahib and demand service."

"Ah! I should like that; but you would not leave my brother?"

"Not unless you trifle with me and make me carry you away, lady mine."

And so happily sparring the two came to the ferry, where the discreet Habib was awaiting them.

"The Lady Miriam will ride out, Habib, to see us march off. Farewell, Lady."

And since the farewell could not be intimate, David stood watching the boat cross to the palace side, and then with a wave of his hand mounted and galloped off to his *camp*. The hurry and excitement of preparation soon effaces from the soldiers' mind for the moment the thought of the women to be left behind, and it was late that night when he finished his preparations and turned back to his own tent for a meal and sleep.

There waiting he found perhaps the man he wanted most. The good *padré* had heard of the move of troops and the frontier troubles, indeed, who had not, and had come to wish God-speed. His heart was warm to David and also to Miriam, and he had noticed, or perhaps hoped, that there might be some link between them. Since Miriam had questioned him of the ways of the European with women away up by the Palace of Fairies he had met her several times and talked. The two were made for each other, he felt.

"Ah, *Padré Sahib*, welcome indeed! You have heard we are off to the wars."

"I have, indeed, my son, and I regret it. There are better things to do with men than killing them."

"Ah, father, you can't expect soldiers to repine. Fighting is our trade, and a man must practice his trade if he be a true man."

"Agreed, my son; but I have seen too many men fall in others' quarrels to wish you joy of a campaign. You've no one to leave behind, but others have. I know that these invaders must be read a lesson, but I mourn the need. I have been among these tribesmen and I know so well the inhabitants of the harried tracts. How long, O Lord! How long?"

The reference to none to leave behind at once brought uppermost his love for Miriam.

"Father, as you have paid me this kind visit let me tell you my troubles before Captain Tone may come. Father! the Lady Miriam has plighted troth to me, and I would marry her as soon as I can get His Excellency to accede; though I know not yet how to approach him."

"My son, I had guessed as much, and I would wish you much joy. Oh, sir, I have had in my life some experience of women, good and bad, and the good are more than the bad. But I have never met a truer woman's heart than beats in that Afghan girl. I wish you every happiness."

And Jean Armande wrung the young soldier's hand.

"Father, one favour of favours I ask of you. Watch over her while I am away. I mistrust those accursed Toorks. Daoud Shah has disappeared. I fear mischief in this valley, and so, I know, does the *Wazir*."

"Son, you do well to mistrust them all. As for that evil Afghan, he has left the valley for none know where. Certain it is he is gone for no good. That man is a devil incarnate, and has the full knowledge of good and evil." And here the *padré* seemed to speak to himself. "He knows, too, the ineffable name."

"What! Do you mean that which is spoken for concealment, *Adonai*?"

"You, too!" said the priest. "How come you to know that which conceals the ineffable name?"

"I, father! I know what my father taught me. He was a prince and a ruler. . . ."

"Tush, my son, never mind it, and never say it. . . . Strange that I a Catholic and a member of the Society of Jesus of all people should talk to you of such forbidden things . . . but this Daoud Shah, he knows far more than you or I . . . he knows it of the old time afore."

"Well, I am glad to know that he knows it. It may

be useful ; but now, father, I appeal to you by the great appeal to protect the Lady Miriam by every means in your power, by all the five. . . .”

“Son . . . I have long foregone such things, and I will help you and your lady not by the appeal of the craft, mighty though the aids be that you invoke ; but for the sake of the Son of God and His Mother, and the greater includes the less.”

And here Captain Tone came up and knelt to the old Abbé, who after some conversation rose to go.

“Your blessing, your Riverence ! before we leave for the war,” he begged, to which David added a plea for the same, “even though I be not a Catholic.”

“Children,” said the old man, “Such blessing as I may bestow is for all the children, whether of the Catholic Church or not,” and the two men knelt, and there under the walnut trees, with the flicker of the camp fires on the waters of the lake, Jean St. Hilaire Armande du Plessis of the family of Richelieu, gave his blessing to those two soldiers of fortune, the old sonorous Latin falling far afield in the clear night air, “*Benedicat vos, Omnipotens Pater, Filius et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen.*”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ARMY ADVANCES

By nine in the morning the whole of the troops were on the road or marching to their boats, and all night long had Yar Khan laboured at his post of commissary-general, and the spade work of war that the young leaders forget till their belts grow loose and their horses lean. To the *Tehsildars*, the representatives of government, had gone forth orders for supplies to be collected forthwith at Bandipura, that landing-place on the great Wular Lake, whence the road rises over the mountain, first to Gurais and then on over the dread Baroghil pass to Gilgit and Dardestan. Five hundred ponies were being collected to carry grain and other supplies, and at least a hundred would be ready for the first start. It was summer now, and the troops must move light.

At the village on the Bandipura road two streams met. One, that of the Bodyguard squadron, under Habib Ullah, and the other that of David's *rissalah*, accompanied by Tone and his pack artillery, the dust of the road rising high and white and acrid above the lance penons. On the hither side of the village sat awaiting them His Excellency and the Lady Miriam with a few orderlies. Riding beside His Excellency was the Lord Altamish, affable and voluble. He was to accompany the force with one hundred and fifty of

his mounted retainers, who were already following behind Habib Khan, somewhat to that gentleman's disgust. There was a screw about his mouth and moustache that made Miriam say to her brother as he passed—

“What is wrong with the *Sirdar*?”

At which Salabat Khan laughed and leant over to her with a glance at Altamish.

“Doesn't like the smell of Toorks, I fancy.”

Directly after passing them, Habib formed up his squadron on an open space outside the village, followed by the Toorks. The new drill had enabled the former to form up quietly and compactly, while the attempt of the Toorks to follow suit was lamentable. A few minutes later David's own *rissalah* marched up in six neatly turned out troops, beautifully mounted, who formed up on the opposite side of the road, the very pink of orderly light cavalry. A kettle drummer too rode at the head, and the deep-rolled musical beat breathed war and splendour. Fifty yards behind came a jinketty jink and a shuffle, and lo! here was the pack battery of which there had been so much talk. Thirty white and grey Yarkandi ponies were carrying two guns and a small mortar, with a good supply of ammunition. The like, so light and movable, had never been seen in Kashmir. Salabat Khan was highly pleased with the results that David had obtained. It was the first time that he had seen it all together, and he had also noticed the steady drill of the infantry whom he had passed *en route* to the boats. Sending for David, Tone and Habib, he gave praise in no stinting fashion. Altamish, too, was forced to praise where he longed to curse and, under cloak of the talk, David managed to get a word with Miriam, and even clasp her hand, while saying—

“Miriam, dear, if there is any trouble while we are

away, rely on the old *padré*. He has power to help you that none other may have."

Then, with a nod from her, it was time to move off, which they did, cheering loudly, David leading. Salabat Khan answering their shouts, said he would join them with the infantry at Bandipura, whereat they cheered again. It took nearly an hour for the mounted men and guns to file through the narrow village, and the sun was high in the heavens before the Governor and Miriam could leave the stirring sight and canter back to the palace. As they went Salabat Khan said to his sister—

"Ah, Miriam, I have seen plenty of soldiers, but never any like the Ferassa *Rissalah* and Habib Ullah's corps. That Ferassa *Sahib* is a treasure, and some day, when Yar Khan wants rest, I will make him *Wazir*. Pity he is not wholly Afghan, or he would make a good husband for you, and perhaps be able to keep you in better order than I can. Eh, my lass?"

But so obviously absurd a suggestion merited no reply, though Miriam did agree and that *con amore*, that the troops were first rate, and the dear Yarkandi ponies with the guns a-top splendid.

But as she rode, ever and anon her heart ran cold, as it had done o' nights since that vision in the fire, at the thought of Daoud Shah of the cleft forehead pacing the garden by the lake shore and projecting himself into *her* life. And she shuddered till the very horse took up the rider's fear and perspired the more.

That night Salabat Khan placed Inayat Ullah, the palace commandant, in temporary charge as governor of the valley, and himself took boat for Bandipura and the Wular Lake, while David's column halted at Sambal, and pushed on early next morning round the shores of the lake to the place of assembly, which they reached ere the sun was over the top of Haramukh.

All that day was spent in packing stores and grain, and arranging for the despatch of convoys to follow. A fat old Goorkha *subahdar* was left at the base on the lake shore as superintendent of stores, which he tested practically by sampling with his finger every keg of *ghee*, licking the same with his lips, till his waistbelt refused to buckle more.

A reliable *sirdar* remained to control the despatch of subsequent consignments. Yar Khan himself, competent at all details, personally supervised everything of this sort, while David cared for the actual war formations and the ammunition. Late in the afternoon came a message from the fort at Kanzilwan to say that they were still holding out but were hard pressed and needed aid at once.

Salabat Khan decided to start forthwith, getting to the top of the Rajdianan Pass that night and advancing on to Gurais in the early morning. To the top of the pass from the lake or rather to a suitable halt a mile or two this side of the top would be some fifteen miles, and Gurais itself some thirteen miles further on. It was essential that the ground to be occupied that night should be clear of enemy, for it is impossible to march by night except in ground already made good, unless extraordinary risks are to be run. David, with his *rissalah* of two hundred lances was therefore pushed on early in the afternoon to make good the top of the pass. This was done without incident, and by five p.m. Salabat Khan received a message from him that all was well, and that the remainder of the force could move under cover of darkness with perfect safety. Soon after midnight the whole of the force save for fifty bayonets left at the base, was quietly collected and sleeping without fires under arms on the top of the Tragbal. It now consisted of six hundred sabres or lances and three hundred bayonets, with a couple of

hundred *kassadars* of little real value in the open despite the fact that several of them were helping hold the fort at Kanzilwan.

The Ferassa *Rissalah* led the way at five a.m., when the first flush of dawn was slowly reddening the snow on Haramukh, and the serrated tops of the distant Burzil. Following behind came the Bodyguard, and then two hundred and fifty men of the Regiment of Victory, with Tone's artillery. After them came the Toork horse to the number of a hundred and fifty, one hundred men of the Regiment of Lightning closing the column with the baggage animals and a hundred ponies packed with supplies. Salabat Khan, with Altamish and Yar Khan rode at the head of the Bodyguard, while David commanded the advanced guard. By seven in the morning the summit of the pass and the long knife-edge at the top had been crossed, and the head of the column was winding down towards the Gurais valley.

Here the first sign of an enemy was encountered. Seeing some smoke at the bottom of the descent from the pass, David had sent Ganesha Singh with half a dozen troopers to see what was the cause of it, and found some twenty men laden with the pillage of a small farm, to which they had just set fire. Ganesha Singh had at once trotted down towards them as fast as the nature of the ground permitted, only to find that half of them had galloped off on their ponies, and the remainder had shinned up the adjacent hillside to take pot-shots at him with their long-barrelled *jezails*. As David came up half a dozen of his Afghan troopers had been dismounted and sent up the hillside to dislodge the snipers, which they soon did. Leaving them as a piquet, David moved out the whole of his *rissalah* into the open valley, and advanced a mile towards Gurais, before he saw any further sign of the enemy. As the leading files, however, turned a bend in the valley the

little fort of Kanzilwan could be seen on a small rise, and round and in front of the fort bodies of troops and skirmishers. It would appear that the fort still held out.

David at once ordered Ganesha Singh to reconnoitre again with half a dozen men, while he moved the advanced guard out of sight behind a grove of ilex in a bend of the stream. The temptation to go forward himself and reconnoitre was strong. It always is in good leaders, but there are times when the true leader will stay behind and let others be his eyes. In this case as the troops were new and untried, and the main body was but slowly filing down from off the pass, it would be well to have the whole force at hand. Salabat Khan himself soon came up, and David explained the situation to him as far as he understood it. By this time Ganesha Singh had gone a mile or so to the front on the open plain, broken by patches of long grass and the meanderings of the Gurais stream.

The tribesmen who had known for some little time that the Kashmir troops were advancing, had redoubled their attacks on the little fort. But the fort garrison also had some inkling that help was forthcoming, and had stiffened their backs accordingly. A considerable body of tribesmen armed with sword and matchlock, were waiting behind a small stony knoll that had at one time been thrown down from the hills above. The fort lay close to the hills, commanding a ford and rough log-bridge over the stream. The plain between the stream and the hills gradually narrowed as the fort was approached, and as the stream was not fordable everywhere, the terrain became restricted for the action of horse, in their advance towards the fort. David could not see this from his position by the ilex grove, nor had Ganesha Singh the time to discover it. Twenty or thirty horsemen advanced on his patrol as

it got near the fort and drove them back helter skelter. Salabat Khan then ordered David to take forward his own men and he would support him with the Bodyguard. The infantry and Toork horse, who had now come down into the open, were to follow, the artillery with them.

The tribal horsemen followed Ganesha Singh and his patrol well down towards the ilex grove, when they suddenly saw the troops descending the hill, and at that moment David moved forward with his leading troop at a hand canter. The troop gave a yell and broke into a gallop which David could not restrain. They were almost all young soldiers, and it was their first fight. Nihal Singh was their commander, and David, pulling up his own horse with difficulty, told the *duffedar* to take them right on while he himself endeavoured to steady the other three troops. It was lucky he did so, for all were excited. However, his voice brought them to their bearings, and he was able to bring them along at a steady trot.

Nihal Singh's troop was wildly out of hand. Better mounted than the tribesmen, it soon came up with the latter. Some were cut down before they could turn, some turned and closed on their pursuers, while others circled their foe for an opening to cut or thrust. It was cut and thrust and curse and cut again, and several men had fallen from their horses, till the *melée* had moved down level with the stony knoll, from out behind which rushed a large number of swordsmen, yelling fiercely. Atop the knoll the tom-tom drummers beat their *doles* or tom-toms in a maddening throb and roll, and Nihal Singh's two score or so seemed hard pressed, for their gallop was over, and each was attacked by two or three of the enemy.

Then the wisdom of David's action was evident enough. Behind were three formed troops, two of

which he now brought up at a smart though steady pace, and charged straight into the crowd, both friend and foe. Their impetus took them right through the crowd, though many of the swordsmen threw themselves on the ground and hacked and hamstrung the horses as they galloped by. Passing through the enemy and nearing the fort, David tried to rally his men, and realized that it would have been wiser to have had some men armed with the lance. Swordsmen a-foot who hack at horses' bellies or who hide in scrub can only be got at or dug out with the lance, which an older soldier could have told him. On the opposite bank of the river were posted matchlock men who kept up a galling musketry fire, and David was beginning to realize that a successful cavalry charge does not of necessity carry you very much further. Here he was, right through the enemy, who, instead of being hopelessly demoralized were lying down in the broken ground defying him, galling by their musketry the troopers whom he was trying to rally and reform. Already three or four had been hit, and there were a few wigs on the green on the site of the charge.

Then Salabat Khan took a hand in the game. Habib Ullah, with half the Bodyguard crossed at a small ford, half a mile back, and came cheering down the bank on which the matchlock men were posted. They were rolled up like straw in the wind, and Habib himself led a score or so of troopers over the rickety bridge and on to the reverse slope of the stony knoll. Half the drummers were sabred, and a small knot of swordsmen broken up. The cessation of the enthusing tom-tom changed the attitude of the swordsmen who were lying in the scrub. They lost their confidence and tried to bolt without cohesion. Then was the time for David's men, both those who had charged and those, like the reserve troop, who only now came up. Round and round

the plain they chased the tribesmen, who fled squealing, rarely turning to aim a half-hearted blow. A dozen or so were cut down, the remainder made their way to the hillside or across the stream to be chased by the Bodyguard who there awaited them. In an hour's time the enemy surrounding the fort had been entirely broken up, and the fight for the relief of the garrison was over, though a large force of men hung against the hillside a mile or so beyond the fort. Salabat Khan was highly elated, and the army very satisfied with itself. Horsemen kept breaking from the ranks to shout out defiance to the distant enemy and recount their own prowess. The troops of the *Ferassa Rissalah* alone kept their re-formed ranks. The action had been so short a one that Captain Tone had no chance to get his guns to work, and was bemoaning the fact in choice Hibernian.

As excitement cooled down, Yar Khan pressed for further plans. Were they to pursue the enemy on the hillside, or should they go into bivouac at once? Already the enemy had reappeared in the far corner of the plain, and clusters of tribesmen with their banners crowned every spur a mile away. David eagerly pressed for an advance. He would take his own men with the Toork horse—let them do a bit—and the guns forward. Yar Khan was divided between the military importance of following up a victory with the question of supply and rest, and the obvious fact that the enemy could not be struck a blow of any value in the remaining hours of daylight. Salabat Khan's decision came promptly enough. David should pursue as he suggested, and at any rate fire his guns off. The remaining troops should go into bivouac. It was not a really admirable decision, but it was a very natural compromise, and quite appealed to the Oriental. As a matter of practical politics, in view of the fact that it

was hoped to get the enemy to stand on the morrow and take some punishment, it was hardly worth while to run the chance of driving him a day's march further off without any certainty of inflicting any real loss.

The result was as might have been expected. David took his force forward boldly, the Toorks leading, his own men in support. A few horsemen careered away in front of him, and a knot of swordsmen advanced with a standard and then thought better of it. The Toorks advanced gaily enough, but there was little to be done; then, coming under musketry range of some of the spurs, they were received by a peppering and wheeled about. Tone brought his guns into action five hundred yards away, but did little except advertise their presence. So, after an hour's field day, enlivened by the sight of the waving standards on the hillside, the throb and roll of the *doles* and the exulting jeers and cries of the tribesmen, David drew off in good order. His men retired by alternate troops, facing about in succession to show a front to the tribal horsemen who hung about at a respectful distance. By five in the afternoon all the Kashmir troops were in camp, cooking their meals and resting their horses, while arrangements for protection for the night were prepared. From a corner of the little mud fort David and Salabat Khan watched the enemy, the former being the possessor of what was almost unknown to Orientals—his father's old spyglass.

Beyond the insolent standards there was little fresh to see, and it only remained to make the morrow's plans and hear the reports of the *Kommadan* of the leaguered fort, and his *khassadars*, and dispose of those killed and wounded in the action.

CHAPTER XXV

DEFEAT

THE next morning found the Kashmir force under arms early. The night had not been a restful one. Half a dozen matchlock men from the hill overhanging the little fort and the ford of the Kishenganga had flicked hammered iron slugs into the camp right through the long night. When the firing commenced, the troops sprung to arms, soon to find that nothing happened, and eventually had slept fitfully at their alarm posts. About midnight, it is true, a throb of *doles* and an outburst of shouting had seemed to indicate a rush of swordsmen, but this had come to nothing. Outside camp in the early morning, however, two of their water-carriers were found hacked to pieces. The army swore vengeance deep and loud. But a disturbed night after a fatiguing day is not the best preparation for another day's fighting, and Yar Khan prevailed on Salabat Khan to let the men cook and finish a good meal before starting.

It was therefore after eight when the advance began. Salabat Khan had decided on advancing straight up the pass in the hope of getting into close contact with the tribesmen. The baggage and a hundred infantry soldiers would remain at the fort, and the whole of the rest of the force would move out. To David's satisfaction the tribal banners still fluttered

on the hillside, a mile and a half away, and a-top the first shoulder perhaps six hundred feet above the Gurais valley. The plan was a straightforward one, so far as arrangement went. David was to dismount the whole of his men save horseholders and advance up the hillside with all the available infantry, totalling some three hundred bayonets and matchlocks. Habib Ullah, with the Bodyguard and the Toork Horse, would remain at the foot of the mountains, while Tone with his guns would accompany the advance.

At the foot of the hill David put his horses under cover from fire, protected by the Bodyguard, and commenced an advance up one of the spurs which led to the enemy's position above. The Regiment of Victory started up a parallel spur, while Tone brought his guns up behind David. When the advance came within a couple of hundred yards of the enemy's standards a spluttering fire of musketry commenced, the bullets from the long hand-made steel *jezails* flicking in with some precision. Two of the guns came into action and began throwing round shot at the stone breastworks behind which the tribesmen stood and yelled defiance. Shooting up-hill with round-shot, however, is not a very formidable proceeding, and after the first moral effect of the artillery fire, the effect grew less on the defenders. Short as it was, however, it created a sufficient lull in the matchlock fire to allow of David's men, of whom a hundred were leading and a hundred in support, to get close within range. One man of every two had a flint-lock carbine *à la* dragoon, and at a distance of eighty yards the leading troop fired a volley, and then started to rush in. The volley and the rush carried the first breastwork. Over the stone walls leapt David's men, who were almost all hillmen themselves. There was a short sharp scrimmage, sword on sword and sword against carbine and locking

ring. Once a gigantic warrior had cut at David, to be shot through the jaw from the young soldier's duelling-pistol, of which he carried the pair in his waist sash. Once a bell-mouthed pistol was jammed against his abdomen by some one behind, but Gul Jan cut the assailant's hand off before he could pull the trigger, and a second trooper cut the man down. In a minute after the troopers had reached the breastwork, the occupants were scuttling back to the next ridge less five of their number. Halting to recover breath after the climb and rush, David stood surveying the ground ahead, when there came loud shouts from the right. Twenty men following one who carried a green banner rushed out on them from a gorge close by. They came silently, and David saw them first.

"Ganesha Singh, look out! Look out! The *ghazis* are coming at you."

Ganesha Singh had a dozen of his own old troop there. They at once ran together. The old officer knew well enough that there was only one thing that could stop the rush. Half a dozen of the men had not discharged their pieces or had reloaded.

"Steady, *sowar-log* *, steady! Now, altogether! Fire!"

Six one-ounce bullets whistled among the *ghazis*, three found a billet, and the attack slowed down. A volley is the recognized remedy for a rush among those who are in the habit of meeting such ugly border tactics. Then Ganesha Singh whipped out his curved sword and, with those of the troopers who had not carbines, rushed at the faltering *ghazis*. They turned and fled, and that particular phase came to an end. A hundred yards further on, however, were more breastworks and banners and more throbbing *doles*.

* Troopers.

The drummers beat on the tightened sheepskins with maddening persistency.

Another hundred yards away on his left, the men of the Regiment of Victory, headed by a small party of Goorkhas, were approaching this upper line. With the support to this advance were Salabat Khan and Yar Khan. Altamish had remained at the foot of the hill with his horsemen. The leading company of the regiment was armed with matchlocks, and it formed a rough front and fired, before advancing to within fifty yards or so of the breastwork. Then their *Kom-madan* called on them to charge, which they did readily enough, but before they could close they in their turn received a volley from the *jezails*, and with a wild roll on the *doles* and a blood-curdling yell the whole of that portion of the defenders flung themselves over their breastwork and rushed down the slope on the Kashmir men. It would have taken all the staunchness of old and tried troops on the Company's model to withstand an assault of that kind. Before the long hacking tribal knives could get within reach, the leading company of the Regiment of Victory broke; turned and fled. Fortunately for them all, Salabat Khan himself was with the second company. He at once put himself at its head and charged the tribesmen. Down went the green banners, and back broke the tribesmen at this fresh onslaught, but not before they had left a dozen of their number on the ground. And while they had been charging down from their breastworks, David's party had been pressing on to the second line of stones, which together with Salabat Khan's onslaught definitely drove the enemy from their main defensive line. With loud cheers the Kashmir troops rushed up to the now vacant breastworks to fire and cheer at the fleeing tribesmen.

But attacking hillmen is like cutting water, as Yar

Khan knew, as Salabat Khan should have known, and as David had to learn. Not three hundred yards further on, down a slight slope and up another rise was another ridge covered in boulder and undergrowth. The fleeing standards were again raised thereon, and the tom-toms slightly more distant recommenced their defiant throbbing. The tribesmen had left perhaps a dozen dead, and had killed ten of the Kashmir troops, while at least twice as many had severe wounds, both musket shot and sabre cut, and the sabre cut from a long, cruel tribal knife is a very severe wound indeed. The tribesmen had to some extent been punished. Twenty, too, had been killed the day before, and whether that was sufficient or not, it was not possible to achieve more. The troops were tired and needed water, and the day was wearing on. A further advance only meant a further unabashed withdrawal of the enemy, and it was quite evident that they could not be brought to battle on even equal terms.

Yar Khan's advice was wisdom itself. It was to withdraw to the valley, carrying off the wounded, despatch them back to Baramullah or Bandipura, and then wait to see if the tribes would venture into the plain where the cavalry might have a chance to get at them again. There was, at any rate, nothing more to be done up the hillside. Reluctantly Salabat Khan gave the order to withdraw, the wounded being first sent off by their comrades in blankets and on the backs of men. The men under David's and Salabat Khan's personal orders remained holding the breastworks they had carried, while the wounded and the dead were being carried down the hill. It was as necessary to carry the dead as the living. The wounded would have been mercilessly slain, and the dead might be mutilated, but at any rate would be shameful trophies in an enemy's hand.

When the last of the bodies was removed, David, in accordance with his instructions, began to fall back down the spurs along which he had advanced. Then immediately the spirit of tribal warfare was evident. The clansmen at once grasped the situation. All along the upper ridges where the banners still waved, the tom-toms redoubled their throbbing, and the yells grew more and more defiant. Here and there a leader would rush forward with a banner and plant it, and the tribesmen would then rush on to it. Just as Salabat Khan began to fall back to keep parallel to David, a red-bearded *moollah*, carrying a huge green banner with a crimson hand thereon, rushed forward to within fifty yards of the breastworks the Kashmir troops had just vacated, shouting the cry of the *ghazi*, "Glory for all and heaven for those who bleed." With him and behind him rushed a hundred yelling devils. Yelling, tom-toming tribesmen are a terrifying sight to any but the best troops, but Salabat Khan was emphatically a soldier and yearned for a personal contest too. That red-bearded *moollah* was too much for him. Calling to the Regiment of Victory to face about and follow him, accompanied by half a dozen of his own *entourage*, he went bald-headed for the green banner. The Regiment of Victory, or that portion of it forming the rearmost party, to its eternal honour responded to the order, faced about and followed their leader under the personal direction of Yar Khan.

But it is not always given to the brave to command success, deserve it however-so-much they may. Ten yards from the banner, a *jezail* bullet fired from a flank struck the Governor on the side of the temple. His orderly on his right spoke afterwards of watching him intently as he advanced, and seeing a blue hole slowly appear in the forehead. The tenth part of the second of striking appeared to him as a slow-measured

happening. Salabat Khan, the powerful and masterful ruler, fell crumbled, on a patch of the Prophet's flower, just as Khar Yan led the remaining men close up behind him. The sight turned the old man bere-serk. Down again went the green banner, down went its followers before the curved keen swords of Yar Khan and his avenging troops. A few survivors fled back to whence they had come, and once again the Kashmir troops occupied the line from which they had withdrawn. But there was no time to lament, and no time to gather breath. The tribesmen had seen the backward movement. From every spur and copse and thicket on either flank the *jezails* were playing, flicking their hammered lead bullets into the Kashmir ranks. Swords-men with the inevitable tom-tom drummer were creeping up in knots waiting a chance to rush in. There was now only one hope of salvation—to get off the hill as quickly as possible. Four of Salabat Khan's personal *retinue*, the most of them wounded themselves, carried off their leader's body, and behind them the Regiment of Victory turned to snarl and bite back at the tribesmen hanging on their heels. The dead and wounded had now to lay where they fell. It was enough if the living could get away. Behind them flashed the relentless swords, and rolled the exasperating, maddening drums. On the flanks the *jezails* never ceased. At last the Regiment of Victory broke, broke badly as sorely-tried corps will, and fled down the hill for safety, away from those biting long tribal knives. Yar Khan and half a dozen of Salabat Khan's personal escort and retainers were left alone in charge of the body. Fortunately, however, the retreat had now come within reach of Tone's artillery, which could fling a shell and roundshot into the pursuing yelling hordes. This enabled Yar Khan to bring away the body without further molestation, until he eventually joined

David's party slowly falling back. This party had also been harassed with *jezail* fire, but had held its own till the flight of the Regiment of Victory had heartened the tribes and freed more men to harass him. Just as Yar Khan joined him, matters were getting to a head, the musketry fire was coming in on all sides and the green banners were creeping in. But while the Asiatic plays a winning game best, the majesty of the English comes out with every access of trouble. Regardless of the hum of the hammered *jezail* ball, David stood, a commanding figure to whom all looked. Jest and abjuration mingled kept his men steady.

"Ganesha Singh! Ganesha Singh! Look at that young soldier on the right there, hiding behind a stone, I do declare! Oh, won't his village be proud of him! Did you say he was a Rajpoot? *Ohé* men, look at the Rajpoot courage! I see a man with a carbine over there who does not know which way the enemy are. Smack his foolish head, Nihal Singh."

Nihal Singh sprang at the delinquent, and his *puggari* rolled on the ground. The owner forgot his fears in his endeavour to recover it and wind it on his head again, while the men near laughed, as David intended they should.

"Ganesha Singh, do you see that old man with the red beard holding a standard and shouting? Try and hide with six men behind that rock, and let him have it as he comes on. We'll teach him to wave green banners at us!"

And all the while the men were dropping, but cheerful, with one eye on their leader and one on the foe. David carried off one wounded man on his own shoulders, shooting an adversary about to hack him as he lay. Steadily the Kashmir troops fell back, so steadily that a great wave of exultation at the success of his own training swept over David. Close below them now

was the gun position, and before they reached it he determined on one more offensive move. A fanatic attacking is a very different being from a fanatic attacked. So while Yar Khan took the Governor's body on down the hill, the rearguard faced about.

"Steady now the *Ferassa Rissalah*. Let us see the Rajpoot valour. Show the Regiment of Victory what real soldiers can do."

And the *Ferassa Rissalah* yelped delight and followed their leaders straight at the swordsmen who looked to serve them as they had served the other regiment. They were mistaken, and they paid for their miscalculation. The green banners streamed back, and the *rissalah* drew off again, well satisfied.

The gun position was not more than three hundred feet above the plain, and just as Yar Khan reached it Habib Ullah rode up the spurs. Troubles rarely come singly, and especially is this true of war. His news was exceeding bitter. The fugitives from the Regiment of Victory had brought news of Salabat Khan's death. Whereon, without ado, Altamish had mounted his men, wheeled about, and galloped off up the valley in the direction of Kashmir. He, Habib Ullah Khan, had not realized what was up till it was too late.

Yar Khan looked at David and then back to Habib Ullah.

"The eternal swine has gone to raise the Toorks against us and declare himself Governor. Salabat Khan is dead and gone to paradise, and can no more rule in this valley, but no one shall rule except myself, if I can help it, till we have the Imperial order for a successor. But there is only one course open."

"To break away and return to Srinagar?" asked David, eagerly. To him the safety of Miriam bulked very large. The old man nodded.

"It is the lesser evil. We have given these pig dogs

a lesson. They will hardly face us in the open for some time. But whether they have had enough or no does not immediately matter. The one thing is to get back to the city and hold the control of the province. They won't follow us now. Let Tone get his guns down to Gurais Fort, with our Governor's body. Habib Ullah, you must cover Ferassa *Sahib's* withdrawal. Look sharp and get the guns away, I will settle further moves at the fort."

It was an hour before Yar Khan had got his survivors together, and the remnants of the corps reformed. The enemy had followed in a half-hearted way as far as the foothills, but the artillery and the resolute front shown by Habib Ullah and the Bodyguard kept them from further harassing the force. Clear of the hills Yar Khan was able to review the situation calmly, and he immediately recognized the fact that he must get out of the Gurais valley that night, or run a fair risk of being hemmed in. At this juncture he could not afford to waste troops by leaving a detachment in Gurais. He must abandon the fort also. The wounded must press on at once. The dead so far as they had been recovered must be hastily buried, the broken Regiment of Victory must have time to cook and recover itself. The small garrison of the post must move off at once with the wounded, and with them on a litter the corpse of Salabat Khan. The remainder of the force would move immediately it was dark, and as soon as they reached the rise up to the Tragbal Pass the mounted troops would move on towards Srinagar, leaving the infantry to come along as best they could. It was certainly the only workable plan, and might result in at any rate saving the province. The orders were soon issued, and the wounded started off as best they could be carried. A few of Habib Ullah's men scoured the level plain and also kept watch on the

foothills. The troops soon settled down to cook, and Yar Khan directed fires to be made that would burn on round the fort after they moved at dusk. David spent his time looking to his own men and horses and heartening up the Regiment of Victory, which he fell in by companies and drilled at close drill for a quarter of an hour before he let them fall out to cook. It was important to get the men back into their companies and obeying orders. The tired, broken men at first hesitated to get into the ranks, till David had kicked half a dozen and reviled them heartily. The non-commissioned officers then heartened up, and order and discipline soon returned. As a climax, David with Yar Khan nodding approval, put them twice through the manual exercise, which they had been taught from the Lille "*l'Exercice de L'Infanterie*," called in the French, "*L'Ecole du soldat*." By the time *Les armes présentée* was well done, the unfortunate corps looked once more as if it belonged to an army. The men broke off to cook, and David and Yar Khan gave themselves half an hour to rest and eat also.

Shortly after five the force was got under arms again, both with a view to moving off and because some knots of tribesmen and standards seemed to be coming down into the valley. David and Habib anxiously watched them. Were the horsemen to be given a chance of revenge? It almost looked like it. The formed troopers were moved out of sight close behind the mud wall of the fort. From the stream, away half-right, a little dry watercourse led towards the hills. A few briar bushes dotted its edge, with here and there an apricot tree. Up this David led a hundred of Habib Ullah's men, with twenty of his own, dismounted, leading their horses, their heads being just invisible. For nearly half a mile he walked without daring to look and see if the enemy were likely to give him a chance.

Then he halted and climbed the slope of the stream-bed. Oh! kind Providence! There they were, nearly half a mile from the hills, moving hastily in three clumps. Were they going to attack the fort? David looked anxiously, hoping that Yar Khan had got that Regiment of Victory into line with the muskets loaded. Then suddenly in front of the leading lot of tribesmen he saw the bait that had more especially brought them down into the open. Three figures were slowly crawling along towards the fort. He drew his spy-glass. It was undoubtedly three of their own wounded, probably of the Regiment of Victory. They must have been left and been able to crawl down unnoticed till they had reached the valley. Fools, not to wait till dark! but perhaps they had guessed the force would retire. There was little time to lose. David ordered the men to mount, and eagerly showed Habib Ullah the wretched three. David, with his own and thirty of Habib's, would charge the first clump, Habib was to take the one a little further back, the more distant clump must wait. The moment the troopers had scrambled up the bank, David showed them the enemy and the three wounded men, of whom he could now see that two were supporting a third. The two bodies of cavalry separated; Habib, riding fifty yards on the right rear of David's party. Advancing at a trot for the first hundred yards, they were now within three hundred yards of the leading tribesmen. "*Yih Hulla ka waqt hai!*" "Shout, men, shout!" The whole broke into a canter, and, yelling like mad, boiled up to a wild gallop. The three wounded men heard and looked, and collapsed. They had hardly hoped for help, and were advancing almost dazed. The tribes stopped to look whence the sound came, and that wait sealed their fate. It does not take galloping eager men long to cover three hundred yards. Mad desire for revenge,

mad yearning to get at a foe who had hunted them so in the morning was the dominating desire, and the yells meant fury and vengeance. The tribesman is a poor thing in the open. The thud of the hoofs on the dry plain added to the horror of the vision. *Quadru pedante putrem sonitu, quatit ungula campum!* The plain shook and the clansmen shrieked with terror, as David and Ganesha Singh struck the clump before it had time to scatter. Two men offered fight for the last time, the remainder fled, to be hacked and sabred. Habib's objective had broken up before he could charge home, but his enraged swordsmen took full toll. Through the broken ranks and back again they rode, till the only vestige of an enemy were odd scurrying figures nearing the scrub of the foothills. David stood waving his sword by the three wounded men, his trumpeter sounding the rally after the manner he had learnt from the English. Gradually the elated troopers assembled, some holding their adversaries' heads in their hands. Re-forming, they returned to camp with no worse result than a few cuts. The whole force was waiting for them, and it was a new spirit and a new pride that met them. In those few minutes the soldiery had passed from depression to jauntiness. Even the Regiment of Victory believed it had borne a share. The three wounded men were brought in amid cheers. There was now no doubt that the force would get away unmolested.

Yar Khan's wrinkles actually wreathed into a smile, despite the bitterness of Salabat Khan's death.

"No wonder you English rule half Hindostan—you deserve to. Now, get your horses blown, and we will move out of this."

By ten o'clock that night the force reached the foot of the ascent and Yar Khan felt that the Regiment of Victory with the guns and the detachment from the Lightning Corps could be left to make their way up

the pass bringing Salabat Khan's body with them to Bandipura. He, David, and those whose horses were fit for it, would go on at once over the pass, rest at Bandipura and push on to the city. So under the stars for many weary hours that body of horsemen, elated yet sore at heart, slowly climbed the *kotal** and led their tired horses down the other side.

* Mountain.

CHAPTER XXVI

BANGLES RING SOFTLY AND SADLY

DAWN in Srinagar on a morning in early summer is very soft and very beautiful. A sweet, cool breeze blew down from the mountains, and a scent of blossom haunted the air. Armande du Plessis knelt in prayer at the little altar in the whitewashed room adjoining that in which he lived. Prayer that peace should reign in that beautiful valley, prayer that blessing might attend his work in healing and in spreading the gospel. A healer of bodies he had been for many years, and there was yet no sign that he had healed the minds. He was old enough, however, to know that God worked in His own method and not in man's, and that the only command was to tell the News, which he, poor refugee priest, had done with all his might.

Then his prayers ended, and because there were wars and rumours of war, or because the soft breeze perhaps blew unrest for all its softness, the Abbé went to his pallet bed and drew from underneath a long red leather bag, worked with a silken pattern at the edges. From the bag he drew a shining basket-hilted rapier, and a case with two small pistols. Wiping the rapier he loaded the pistols, looked to their priming, and then placed them under the skin rug that covered the bed. They, his Bible, a small ebony crucifix, and the miniature round his neck, were all that he

possessed of the old happy life in *La Belle France*. He then passed to the tiny mud room where he kept the few drugs and herbs that the resources of Kashmir could purvey, and which his extending knowledge of the secrets of medicine was slowly augmenting, and busied himself in making certain extracts that he was likely to want. His day's work had begun.

Allah Visayah had been sleeping out in the latticed verandah overhanging the Jhelum, whose sluggish muddy waters lapped the plinth below in a monotonous night-long chant, coating the old carved gods on the stolen plinth stones with a fresh coat of mud, for there had been rain on the clay hills above Verinag. Allah Visayah was tired, and had meant to sleep late, after a long evening entertaining those officers whom she hoped to bring over to the service of Altamish. But, just as her servants were closing her outer gates, lo ! one Wali Dad arrived, weary and mud besplashed, full, however, of the good news. He had ridden through on relays to Symbal, and had come on in a *shikara* by water. It had been necessary to admit him and hear his good news of the death of Salabat Khan. No fiction this time, but solid, joyful fact. Allah Visayah already saw the Pampur estates standing in her name. Wali Dad had come for one hour's sleep, and to ascertain which *Kommadans* might be looked to to at once declare for Altamish. She told him which of her friends, chiefly officers of militia, could be relied on to give up their trusts. Told him also how the *Kommadan* of the Lightning Regiment at Hari Parbat Fort would listen to no one. Was not the corpse of the late *Kommadan* still hanging in chains over the gateway ? To which Wali Dad had replied that he was now as like to hang for sticking to his master as his predecessor was for deserting him, which was true enough, and the Begum grinned thereat. Wali Dad had slept an

hour and gone, and Allah Visayah had meant to sleep late in the cool, shady verandah.

Hardly had she got properly off to dream the dreams of those who are on the right side of the fence after all, than a small *shikara* was paddled up to the steps in the plinth by two men with perspiration streaming from their brows. It was Peeroo and Pheroo, and in the boat sat an old woman, and in her arms a child.

"Oh, *Begum Sahiba!* Oh-e! Oh! *Begum Sahiba Darwaza kohlo jaldi!*"* The Begum drowsily stirred and stretched and below the child wailed. That caught her ear. Surely that was her little Dundoo, who should be peaceably asleep in the *Jhok* on the Sindh! She leapt up wide awake now, and called her servants, and then threw open the lattice window. The old woman, Dundoo's nurse, was bringing in the small child. Very small and shrunken it looked under the treble muslin wrapper. The Begum flew down to meet it. That child, whose father she could hardly even guess at, was all the world to her, more even than that dream of the Pampur estates since was it not for him she wanted them. She, the outcaste, who dreamed of her son founding a race of landowning barons!

The boy was but running the course of so many children in early summer. It was the mulberry season. In Kashmir everything happens in the mulberry season. "*Jab molbari hoga*"† is the promise. The dogs eat mulberries, and the fish eat mulberries, and the bears eat mulberries. *Jab molbari hoga*, then, is the time to catch fish and shoot bears. It is the small, sweet mulberry that grows wild and forms half the hedges and the avenues to the roads, not the great luscious king of mulberries, the *Shah-tout*. That only grows in the gardens of princes. It is the sweet,

* Open the door at once.

† When the mulberries come.

the sickly sweet, wild mulberries that every one and everything eats at this season, especially children. Which was the tale of little Dundoo. Too many mulberries added to hot days and cold nights had brought on infantile cholera, which would not yield to the old wife's remedies, and the nurse had started to the mother in a boat.

Allah Visayah now wholly mother, seized the little shrunken figure and remembered the good *padré* and how she had served him by taking in the leper. She knew where he lived, and followed by the old nurse and Peeroo, she made towards the Shah Hamadan mosque, past the little old burial ground and a skull that half stuck out of a grave, straight for the little mud, whitewashed house of the Abbé. The Abbé, as we have seen, was at work in his dispensary. Without knock or call the mother went straight in, laid the child on the floor behind him, and threw herself down clasping his ankles. Armande du Plessis, who had not heard her entry, absorbed in his compounding, turned round.

"Save my child, *Padré Sahib*! Save him! I know you can."

The Abbé was used to the treating of sick babies, and the case of Dundoo was clear enough, the stains of mulberries on the child's garments gave the clue. The opium jar was the obvious resort, with some powdered ginger added thereto, and while preparing this he asked for news of the city, and more especially of the seat of war.

"There has been severe fighting, and a disaster in the mountains, and the Governor has been killed."

"We have heard that before," returned the Abbé.

"Yes, *Padré Sahib*, I know, but this is true. Salabat Khan is dead, and a good riddance too."

"A good riddance! Why, this valley has never been so well governed."

"Pah! Folk want something more than good government, at least town folk do. We want excitement and display, and a chance for those that are down. Every one hates these solemn Afghans. We want Persians or Toorks to rule us. I've no use for this lot, and as for that stuck-up Miriam, I should like to spoil her beauty."

"What harm has the Lady Miriam done you?"

"Harm! Why, not content with riding about with her brother, which a decent woman should be ashamed to do, she goes past my house with her chin in the air as if we of the Thunbi Bazaar had no right to live. We are more use in the world than she is."

The news of Salabat Khan's death was serious, very serious! Not only might his European employés be involved in the slaughter, but what was to become of the Lady Miriam? That simple, straightforward girl had found a very warm corner in the Abbé's heart. Not only had he detected and rejoiced at her *penchant* for David, but her constant questionings, whenever they met, which they often did, on the Christian faith, had raised great hopes in his heart of a real convert at last. For years had he sown the seed, but it had fallen by the way. Here some unforeseen breeze had wafted it to good soil. Always dwelling on the Christian ideal of women, that had so obviously attracted her from her first contact with the European point of view, he had taught her much of the Glad Tidings. He felt that Miriam was already a Christian at heart. The fate of David and her position aroused a keen anxiety and a desire to be up and doing. But this woman knew half the gossip and much of the secrets of the city. He would get more from her.

"If I promise to save your child, you must tell me

what you know. Who will carry on the Government?"

"Why, the Lord Altamish, of course. Already all the Toork nobles and their retainers hold the town and its approaches, and the *khassadars* will all declare for him."

"But what of Kabul?"

"Pshaw! Kabul, indeed. The empire is almost a name now. Kabul will ratify whoever has the power. The Toorks will gain possession of the Shergarhi to-day, and will surround the Kashmir troops when they return."

"The *Kommadan* of the Shergarhi will never give up the palace."

"No. But he has a small garrison. Most of the best troops went to the wars."

"What will become of the women, of Salabat Khan's wives, of the Lady Miriam?"

"Oh, the wives will be allowed to go back to their families probably. Who would be bothered with them? Some one will carry off Miriam, no doubt. Her brother is dead, and there will be none to raise a feud over her, the minx."

"Do you wish your child to live?"

"To live? Ah-h, *Padré Sahib*!"

"Very well, this child will die unless I save it. It will require my medicine for five days. Now, understand me very clearly. I shall not make that medicine unless you help me. The Lady Miriam must escape with me, and you must arrange it for me. No need to ask why. I want to get her away. I shall give you one dose for your child to-night. I will give you eight more powders, one for morning and one for evening, when I find that the Lady Miriam will be safe. Now sit down there and think about it. Here, take the child and rock it to sleep. See, the pain has gone."

It was true the little drawn features had become round again. The Begum sat and crooned to it. She was woman of the world enough not to talk needlessly, and at once set about thinking out a plan. The Abbé went to his bed and drew out the long rapier and laid it handy, and then went back to his dispensary while the Begum sat crooning to her boy, who was already asleep. The *Padré Sahib* was clearly a master of life and death, and must be humoured; besides, he had the power of witchcraft, she knew, and witches must never be crossed. There was only one way for him to get the Lady Miriam away, and that was by entering the palace, telling her the danger, and getting her to come out and away with him. But there was also only one way to get at her at short notice, and that would be by permission of the *Kommadan*, in which case he must be told. In any case, what did it matter? If he knew, he would either prepare to defend the palace or give it up. His garrison was very weak; he could not do much if he did resist. So cogitating, the Begum called to the Abbé, who came to her and felt the child's pulse.

"Ah! he sleeps well. He may recover; if he has my drugs he surely will."

"*Padré Sahib*, for the sake of my child and your cure, I will now arrange to help you. This is what you must do. You must go to the *Kommadan* of the Shergarhi and tell him the news, and say that you have come to lead the Lady Miriam to safety. If he raises difficulties you must bribe him. Here is a chain of gold and turquoise. You shall give him this to win his sanction. He must then let you out by the Eastern gate, which is on the river. I will have a boat with four rowers waiting, and they will take you upstream towards Islamabad. The boat cannot be ready before eleven in the morning, and it will wait there till

midnight to-night for you. I will put food into it for you. Now swear to me that if I have the boat there you will give a fifth man, who shall be in the boat, the four days' drugs and he will return to me."

"Lady, I swear it by all I hold holy."

"Very well, then, the sooner you can get to the palace, the better; and I will now take home my Dundoo, who now sleeps as he used to sleep. Oh, *Padré Sahib*, I will do all I have promised, and much more if you will save the child."

And Allah Visayah, the remnants of yester'eens paint and antimony on her face, and her hair still showing the talc powder with which it had been sprinkled, looked nevertheless a woman and not a jezebel as she gently rose and carried off the sleeping child.

Armande du Plessis had few preparations to make. Under his white cassock he strapped the rapier, and put the two primed pistols into the belt. He then put the Bible in his pocket, locked the door of his humble dwelling, and called for a *shikara* just as in Paris he would have called for a *fiacre*. Three or four public boats answered his call from the wide steps on the plinth below the mosque, and he at once set out for the Shergarhi, feeling some confidence that once again a piece of good Damascus steel hung from his side, so persistent is the old Adam in the holiest of men. Half an hour's paddling brought him to the palace landing stage. Tossing a *chilki* rupee to the rowers, he sprang up the steps with the alertness of that same young Abbé who was reputed one of the best swordsmen in Paris, or at any rate about the Court.

Outside the palace gate was a wooden pavilion, under which the palace writers sat taking note of those who came and went, and of those who had business. At one end was a seat reserved for the

commandant, who had just come down from it, about to go inside as the Abbé came up. Knowing the Abbé by sight, for since David and the Lady Miriam had struck up a friendship with him he was a fairly familiar figure, the commandant stopped to see what he wanted. After greetings, du Plessis craved a private audience, and Inayat Ullah took him into a cool chamber adjoining the guard room at the gateway.

"Commandant *Sahib*, I have come on vital business. You know the rumour, and I believe it is a true rumour, that Salabat Khan has been killed and the troops severely handled."

"No, *Padré*, I have had no news from the front at all, except that the fort of Gurais had been easily relieved, and all is well."

"I understand that the Governor is dead; the troops if not defeated at any rate severely handled, and that Altamish will at once declare himself Governor. Also that the Toork faction will prevent the troops from returning, and that the *khassadar* garrisons will admit the Toorks to all the government forts they are garrisoning."

"That, if true, is very serious, for all the best troops are away. I have only twenty good men here, the rest are Shapiyon *khassadars*. If this is true, which God forbid! I cannot hold this place, nor do I know for whom to hold it. By Imperial custom, the *Naib*, that is the *Sirdar* Yar Khan, should govern till the Emperor's will is known, but Kabul is a far cry, and if Altamish takes the government and makes submission to Kabul, I doubt any one saying him nay. Therefore, too, I must consider my own position, and the lives of my own men. I must either give up the palace and ride away with those who will follow me to seek fresh service, or I must join the Toorks. That I would not willingly do. I would gladly die for

Salabat Khan, but not for a lost cause when the master is dead."

All of which was a very just *resumé* of the situation, as du Plessis could but admit. He at once came to the point.

"I wish to give safe custody and escape, with honour, to the Lady Miriam, with your approval. I am in some sort her guardian."

"Well, there are the other ladies, too, who must be considered. They are only an anxiety to me. I will make a bargain with you. If you will take away the Lady Nur Jan and the Bibi Alana, too, I will help you in every way, and if I have to leave this will come after you and help escort them to their own homes in the Punjab. Will you do this?"

The proposal was not altogether an alluring one, and a squire of dames was too old a *rôle* to be in itself attractive. God knew! he had seen enough in his time of poor ladies wanting safe conduct, and if needs must he was ready enough to do it, and he said so.

"Good," said Inayat Ullah. "There is no actual need to move till we know something definite. The *Sirdar* Yar Khan and the young *Sahib* may be here and able to keep control. You had better see the Lady Miriam at once and let her tell the *Bibis*."

Word was at once sent up to Miriam, that the *Padré Sahib* wanted to speak with her on urgent matters, and he was accommodated in a small private hall of audience, with a carved grille at one end, used by the ladies of the palace for such purposes. A very few minutes and a rustle of clothes told the *padré* that some one had arrived. It was Miriam, who, disdaining to talk from behind the grille, opened the wicket and came into the hall.

"You want to see me, father. You have news? Oh, bad news. I know it?"

"Lady! nay, daughter! There are very serious rumours, not yet confirmed, but so serious that we must at once be prepared. It is said that your brother has been killed in battle with the tribes, and that Altamish is about to proclaim himself Governor, seizing the palace and forts by force. Soldiers are few, and the militia are said to be ready to join him. Indeed, if your brother is dead, there is no very strong duty owing to any one, and unless the *Sirdar* Yar Khan can return in force, there is nothing very much that any one can do. I have been consulting with Inayat Ullah, and I am now prepared to take you up the river in a boat with the two ladies of your brother's household. There is no one else to do it."

"Oh, *Padré Sahib*, my poor brother! What of *Ferassa Sahib*? Is he killed?" and the voice presaged utter desolation.

"Nay, daughter, we have no news; we believe him well and Yar Khan also. The earlier reports spoke of the relief of Gurais Fort and victory. But we know nothing yet. You must keep calm for the sake of the others. You will fall into the hands of Altamish unless we are ready to escape. You must at once tell the ladies, and have them, with some bedding, ready to move if need be in half an hour's time at most. When you are ready, we shall not actually leave till we have information of some kind."

"Where are we to go to?"

"You must go up towards Islamabad for the present, till we can get in touch with Yar Khan and Fraser *Sahib*, and cannot see further ahead yet."

"Oh, that I was a man to get even with that Altamish; ah, yes, and that devil-faced Afghan who used to be about with him."

"Ah, yes, my daughter, that is a man whom even I, an old priest, and a man of peace, would fain be

even with for many reasons, for many reasons. Now go tell the *Sirdar's* ladies, and may God in His mercy soften the blow!"

So Miriam went away sorrowfully, and du Plessis returned to the guardroom to be near Inayat Ullah and watch the situation. There was little else to be done, however so much the spirit might fume, but the memory of the sight she had seen in the fire before the image of Indra held her a nightmare. Daoud Shah, with the cleft forehead pacing in his garden and thinking of her! Death, rather death a thousand times, than fall into his hands!

Armande du Plessis watched her go. "Mary! Pity women," was the prayer on his lips. He who in Christian France had seen the heart torn from the still warm body of the Princess *de Lamballe*! Could worse befall in heathen India!

CHAPTER XXVII

TENDER RUTH

THERE was no very great period of suspense. Hardly had the Abbé taken up a position in the guardroom, than message was brought to the commandant that the Lord Altamish had been proclaimed as Governor of Kashmir in lieu of Salabat Khan killed in action with the tribes of the Black Mountain. The city was in an uproar, and parties of Toork horsemen were everywhere. The Treasury guard had been overpowered, and a Toork guard mounted in its place. The Lord Altamish had returned from the front to take over the government. All the watchmen and police in the city had agreed to take orders from him. It was now close on eleven o'clock, and the Abbé went to the Eastern gate to see if Allah Visayah's boat had arrived. A long-prowed boat paddled across from the opposite bank as he came on to the parapet above the gate. It had four rowers with a covered curtained sort of deck cabin in the stern, such as was often used to take purdah women about in. As the Abbé stood up on the parapet his head and shoulders showing over, a fifth man sitting in the bows, stood up and salaamed to him. The Abbé waved a reply. It was undoubtedly the boat, he would get an order from Inayat Ullah to get out through the Eastern wicket and hold converse with the man in charge. Hurrying back to the mainguard, he found Inayat Ullah standing

at the gate in converse with two messengers, who presently rode away.

"*Padré*, those two men have come from Altamish. One is that rogue Wali Dad. They have come to tell me that Altamish has been proclaimed Governor, and to inquire when they can take over the palace! I was more than inclined to give them a rough answer at their impertinence in assuming it would of necessity be theirs. However, I spoke them fair and promised that I would yield the place at four of the afternoon and not a moment before. They urged that they should have it earlier. I said they must fight for it if they insisted on that, but they should have it free at four. I have therefore till four. At that hour I give over the place. Yar Khan may arrive before that."

"What shall the ladies do?"

"I should say that if nothing happens by noon that you should start away to Islamabad. If I decide to leave Kashmir, I shall come and join you. Here is an order to you to come and go through the East gate, and Allahdad Khan here will go with you."

The Abbé went away to the East gate, stopping on his way to see Miriam, who again came down to the grille, to say that the ladies were ready, and that whereas Nur Jan was quiet and resigned and would go wherever wanted, Alana Bibi was in a furious hysterical mood. Du Plessis told her the news of Altamish's proclamation and how they would start at noon if nothing happened. Miriam promised to be ready, and the Abbé went on through the Eastern gateway to the bank, to talk with the man in charge of the boat. As they approached the steps, Allahdad, a huge, grizzled-looking man with a red-gray stubble of a beard, asked if the Governor's ladies were going with him. The Abbé explained that he was taking them away pending help from Yar Khan.

"Then," said Allahdad, "I will come with you and nine others. The Lady Nur Jan is of the Chib clan. Her brother is a baron owning lands to the west of Poonch. We will help you see her in safety to her brother. We will ride upstream to-night and get in touch with you."

And the Abbé, liking his rugged old face, made a pact with him then and there, and told him how unless he heard from Yar Khan he would make his way up to Islamabad. Needs must when the devil drives, and if you had to trust people it were well to do it thoroughly, with an eye, however, on what might befall.

Twelve o'clock soon came without any sign from Yar Khan or Fraser and Inayat Ullah urged the Abbé to go while yet there was time. He willingly agreed that the Chibs should go after them, and added that Allahdad was a very faithful servant and an old retainer of the right sort. The priest and the soldier then embraced in Afghan fashion, and the former went to the ladies' quarters and there found three veiled and shrouded figures awaiting him, with three serving women carrying bundles. The serving women were more than he had bargained for, but as a query raised a fretful remark from Alana Bibi, he said no more and the six women scrambled into the boat, and squatted inside the deckhouse. The Abbé according to pact then gave into the hands of the fifth man in the prow of the boat the bundle of powders for the Begum's child, and bidding the rowers lay to, stepped on board himself.

Up in the palace, Inayat Ullah had summoned all the troops, the *khassadars*, and officials, and told them how Altamish had declared himself Governor, and how at four o'clock he would release all men from any obedience to himself. He would ride forth to join the Sirdar Yar Khan and seek fortune afresh,

whoever of his own men who cared to follow him might do so. Then through the afternoon hours he sat in the bastion above the gate and looked eagerly for some sign of Yar Khan or even some mention. But though now and again dust rose or parties of horse appeared in the distance, nothing drew near that could be Yar Khan. Shortly after three a large number of Toork horsemen approached the gate of the palace, and with them rode Altamish himself anxious to take up his official quarters, and relieved that it had all come about so peacefully. If the truth were known Altamish had no heart for more fighting to his own personal hand than was actually necessary. Inayat Ullah, an obstinate man of his word, took not the slightest notice of him and his escort till four o'clock, for which hour Altamish waited with such patience as he possessed, cursing under his breath all tiresome Afghan punctilio. At four o'clock there being no sign at all of Yar Khan and party, Inayat Ullah drew up the remaining twenty odd troopers of the garrison immediately within the gate. The said twenty men having all signified their intention of riding away into the world with him, the gates were thrown open, and Inayat Ullah sent word to Altamish that he might ride in. Hardly had he done so when a sign of dust on the horizon that might have been Yar Khan, was visible through the gateway, but Inayat Ullah, a man of his word, sat immovable.

Altamish rode in cautiously, followed by a couple of hundred horsemen, though before they entered Inayat Ullah led his men out lest they be caught in a trap. Without more than a passing salutation, he remarked to Altamish that the palace was his and prepared to ride away. The dust on the horizon changed to a party of galloping horsemen, and who should ride up hot haste but the *Sirdar* Daoud Shah

himself, and with him a score or so of wild-looking Toork and Persian troopers. Drawing rein at the gateway, he entered alone and found Altamish at the entrance to the ladies' apartments.

"Where are the late Governor's women, his wives, and the Lady Miriam, his sister?" he demanded.

"I am told that they have left the palace some hours ago," replied Altamish.

"Who allowed them to go?"

"Why, that palace commandant who has just made over the palace to me as the new Governor."

"Has he had the impertinence to let these women go?"

"Well, I don't know that I mind. I don't want 'em. Got more than enough of my own, and, as you know, Azizun alone is enough in the way of anything extra."

"Fool! What do I care about you and your women. I want that precious sister of his to be my wife. For what else do you suppose that I have been interfering in your affairs? Fetch the commandant back at once."

"You won't find it easy by force. Perhaps I can get him back. Here, Wali Dad, ride and ask that *sirdar* to return here. Say that I have that to speak of that will be greatly to his advantage."

Inayat Ullah, who had only moved, and that at a walk, some one hundred and fifty yards from the palace gateway, turned back. He was not really particular with whom he took service, and was quite open to a tempting offer.

He halted his party and looked back. He then wheeled them about, half hesitated, and then halted them. That halt was his undoing. Daoud Shah slipped out with his men and rode away to one side, and Wali Dad had led out some thirty Toork troopers

on the other. Inayat Ullah was surrounded. Fearing nothing, however, that sturdy soldier of fortune rode up to Altamish and saluted.

"Your Excellency summoned me."

"Yes! I wanted to know what had become of the ladies of Salabat Khan's household."

"They left the palace some hours ago."

"I would know where they went."

"That, Excellency, is their business. I neither know nor care."

At this juncture Daoud Shah had ridden up and he sat his horse as men sit who live in the saddle. Fair and square he sat, with his eyes blazing out from under his fierce lowering eyebrows, and his forehead knit with a scowl. Inayat looked into that weird countenance, and for the first time in all his life shuddered, and with reason. Daoud Shah barked at him in short *staccato* tones.

"Do I understand that you have allowed the ladies of Salabat Khan's household to leave the palace?"

"That is so," said Inayat Ullah, his temper rising. Even the foul fiend himself must speak civilly if he would have an answer from him.

"By what right do you dare to do this thing?"

"By my sole right as commandant of the palace."

"Will you tell me where they have gone?"

"I do not know where they have gone, and I should not tell you if I did."

Whereon Daoud Shah's lips curled in a snarl on his set teeth, and riding close to the jaunty sturdy *sirdar* barked at him again.

"Then take that for your pains," and struck him across the face with a small, heavy mace of brass that he carried, studded at the head with some set stones.

Inayat Ullah, taken unawares, made a feeble attempt to ward off the blow, and fell from his horse half

stunned. His troopers gave a yell of rage, and dashed in to help their leader. But the Toork horse at once closed on them, and a fierce hack and slash ensued, with the inevitable result that four or five of them fell and the remainder broken and outmatched, scampered away with Toork troopers after them.

Altamish, rising in his stirrups, said to Daoud Shah, "I would not have had this. This man deserved safe conduct."

"This man deserved nothing of the kind, as does no man who thwarts Daoud Shah. Your revolution needs anointing, ah ha! You need a victim. Never should a revolution take place without the red blood flowing. Come, now, you must clinch your position. I demand now that this dog, who has stood in my way, be blown away immediately from that gun up on the bastion yonder, that all the world may know that you are Governor and I am your *wazir*. Nay, my lord, will it be necessary that I should tell you once again why you will do that which I bid. Surely you have not forgotten?"

And Daoud Shah looked straight into the eyes of Altamish, who turned his head and said—

"*Wazir*, let it be as you wish."

Whereupon then and there, the wretched Inayat Ullah Khan, only yet half sensible from the blow he had received, was carried up on to the bastion and tied to the gun, which was loaded first with a double charge, the shot having been withdrawn.

Blowing away from a gun is a favourite Eastern punishment practised in Kabul to this day, and one thoroughly understood of the people, as a sign of power, majesty, and dominion. As an outward and visible sign at this epoque, it was no doubt a desirable happening. The death, too, had the questionable merit to the Oriental of being instantaneous and

practically painless. On the other hand, it was certainly a good *tamasha*, a good spectacle for onlookers. So several willing hands bound the wretched Inayat Ullah to the gun, and the method of the binding was this. The prisoner was placed standing in front of the piece, the muzzle pressed against the small of his back. His body and wrists were bent back and lashed to the tops of the wheels, while below in the same way his ankles were bent back and lashed to the bottom of the wheels, the victim thus being as it were, a spread eagle, or a Saint Andrew's cross. All was then ready for the sacrifice to a relentless vengeance, and the possible need for some sign of authority. Standing behind the piece stood an artilleryman with a priming horn and wad, and opposite him another with a lighted port fire.

One moment of suspense, and then the new *wazir* himself gave the order to fire. The great gun roared, and away to the horizon flew the mortal remains of the gallant Inayat Ullah—butchered to make a holiday even as the Romans did, his poor arms and legs dropping back to the wheels to which they were lashed. The head blown high in the air, fell down on to the floor of the bastion. . . . “And none so poor to do him reverence.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STRATAGEM OF FEROF TUGLAK

ALL through the night the wearied horsemen continued their forced march from Gurais towards the Holy City, and by the small hours of the morning had reached Bandipura at the foot of the Tragbal, by the shores of the great Wular Lake. Here happily some food for man and beast could be found. Knocking up the sweetmeat-sellers, some *jellabies*, tea and curds could be got for the men. For the horses it was possible to find materials for a pudding of flour and sugar and powdered ginger, such as would keep them going for another twelve hours. The horses fed, the men swallowed what they could get, and fell asleep by the roadway holding their horses' reins, too tired even to set a watch. And David, old in the minor truths of war, saw that it was wiser to risk a surprise than to force over-tired men beyond the powers of the bonds of discipline.

It was therefore David and Tone themselves who shared the watch, for even Yar Khan slept. Tone had unwillingly left his guns and his treasured *Igd-i-gul*, urged thereto by David, who realized that the troops alone could, if need be, make their peace with the new administration, while Tone might easily be sacrificed. It was in the hour of trouble that the Irishman showed especially to advantage, and as he grew more tired, and the men around more dejected, the higher rose

his natural spirits. From three a.m. till seven, and not a second more, did David the inexorable allow that bivouac sleep, having dozed but the last two hours himself. Away on the western slopes the sun shone merrily across the valley, though Bandipura still lay in the shadows of Haramukh, when the tired men stretched themselves, and demanded more tea and curds from the sweet-sellers and watered their horses in the lake. Yar Khan was about in all his vigour, and in half an hour the party started for Srinagar. Wounds, death, and broken-down horses had now reduced their total to little over a hundred. The surviving animals, however, were of wire, and could be relied on, and David believed that the men, certainly those of his own *rissalah*, could all be trusted to follow his fortunes. Indeed, he felt that every stout heart and trusty sword would be needed if Miriam was to be carried safe out of the turmoil of the valley. All down the slow winding track from the Tragbal, with the tired horses slipping and stumbling there had been one echo in his heart and mind, just Miriam! Miriam! with a plaintive wail in tune to the chorus of the slipping of the horses' feet on the dew-wet rocks. Now as the refreshed cavalcade trotted off on the road to the city, the same refrain beat to a new tune. The horses' hoofs rattled and the accoutrements clattered, and the sun shone, and the tune was a cheerful one, Mir-Mir-Miriam! Mir-Mir-Miriam! till even the tired horses took up the spirit of hope and the desire for action.

David and Yar Khan rode at the head, and talked of plans. They would get to the Shergarhi if possible, and join forces with Inayat Ullah, get the garrison of the Hari Parbat, all staunch they knew. They would make Altamish smell hell as he had never smelt it before. Some must swim while others sink, no doubt, but that Altamish must be brought low. What

if they had got the Shergarhi and carried off the ladies or refused to give them up. Ah, well ! there would be riot of chargers and revel of blows with a vengeance. Tone rode up to join in the discussion. Could he come by more cannon if need be ? Yes, there were three good pieces left in Hari Parbat, and there were two in the Shergarhi. One on the bastion at the main gate, one in the godown. Could he get ammunition for them ? "May I be damned, rammed and crammed down the big gun of Athlone if I can't," said he. "Give us enough force to maintain ourselves, I'll fit out your cannon."

So full of spirit and hope and plans they rode on, resting their horses for a few minutes every three or four miles lest they give way altogether. But once again the race is not always to the swift neither the victory to the strong. Among those who had openly joined forces with Altamish on the occasion of the memorable garden party in The Garden of Sweet Breezes, was Feroz Tuglak, one of the "Lords of Turan," lord of the manor by imperial grant, of the country east of the Jhelum, and north of the Sindh between the Wular Lake and that river. With three hundred horse and some *khassadars*, he had been deputed to prevent any of Salabat Khan's followers returning to Srinagar. Lord of the manor of Bandipura, he easily made it his business to know what passed there ; and while the tired troopers had drunk curds and slept, a tobacco seller had left his booth and taken count of the number of troopers, and then sped away on a pony to the village of Pulpattan, near where dwelt my lord Feroz Tuglak. Now, as the country was heavy with rice cultivation and marsh, the only road to the city lay through that village. Therefore, the Toork had arranged cunningly. An officer of his, with fifty of his *khassadars* armed with matchlocks, would remain hid in the village at the far

end of which would be a barricade. Outside on the village green his three hundred Toork troopers would be drawn up, awaiting to charge in and to close the exit, while the matchlock men harried Yar Khan's force as soon as it was well involved in an apparently peaceful village. All of which was simple enough. A little while after ten o' the morning, the advanced troopers of Fraser's corps came into the village and cantered through. It was a longish mud and dab village of one single street, and they did not come on the barricade till their main body was well involved. Apprised of trouble in front, David dashed forward to reconnoitre. Then it was that the matchlocks opened, some one rolling a tom-tom. From every house a long barrel protruded and flashed. Back galloped Yar Khan and Tone to endeavour to extricate the party, the way it had come, only to find the entrance of the village now closed with two bullock-carts and a row of matchlocks. Then returning to the front they met the whole of the Toork mounted retainers, and a wild fierce *melée* ensued—lance and scimitar and flint horse pistol, kicking biting horse and yelling partisan till there was an inextricable jam in the main road. From the roofs matchlock men were picking off the Afghan troopers, and very soon a house caught fire to spread furiously in the morning breeze. Hell for leather and devil take the hindmost! hit and hit again! curse the swine that blocks the way! Die and be damned to you! Altamish! Altamish! *Fateh Afghannon, Ferassa Sahib ki Jai!* On the roofs of the house that burnt not, the busy mockers loaded their matchlocks again and again to fire into the jam of Afghan troopers. Many of the latter fell to be trampled under the horses, many carried away a matchlock ball; but at last Yar Khan followed by several of the harder spirits cut their way through the Toorks out past the burning houses

into the green and then galloped away down a side path that led to the Jhelum. A few hundred yards gone, he pulled up for the dropping horses, and waited to see if more would join him. And as he waited he bitterly thought of the world lost, and the end of the Afghan faction in the province. Nothing to do but to set his face to the world once again! He had done it often enough, but was gey old to do it once more. Gradually there dribbled out to him thirty or forty of Fraser's men, and a dozen or so of his own. The shouting died away and none seemed to pursue. And Yar Khan turned his back on the blazing village, and the shouts of the villagers fighting the flames, to head for a ferry on the Jhelum, across which he would allow rest and sleep but not before.

What had become of David? Ah! that was the chief thought in the brave old mind as he slowly led away his weary wounded following. It was certainly madness to go and look for him. As a matter of fact David himself was safe. Riding forward when his men had first reported an obstacle, he had found the barricade with matchlock men behind it, and had galloped back to find himself cut off from Yar Khan by the press of horsemen. With him were now but four survivors, Nihal Singh the *duffedar*, Gul Jan, and two Rajput troopers, who had been forward with Nihal Singh as the advance points. There was only one thing to do, and that was get clear, so the five turned back towards the barricade. Coming down the street towards them where a dozen or so Toork troopers, some carrying lances. Before these could recover themselves, or bring their lances to the charge, David's party dashed headlong into them overturning two, while at least one head rolled from its shoulders beneath Nihal Singh's practised sweeping cut. Through the crowd they dashed on to the barricade to find it only

composed of thorn scrub. Straight into the face of the thorns and the matchlocks David led them, which in itself was enough to paralyze the aim of the musketeers. Stirred to a supreme effort, four of the tired horses leapt the barrier, David cutting down one of the defenders as he did so, and it was not till they were a hundred yards clear that they counted heads and found one of the Rajputs missing. Alas! a musket ball had penetrated his horse which had fallen across the barricade. A few seconds had sufficed for the rider to be knifed before he could struggle free from his horse. The mercy of God had come in a swift end.

It was no time to wait for those who fell by the way, and David preferred to put four hundred yards between him and the hostile matchlocks ere he drew rein. Slipped from their stumbling horses, they took cover behind a clump of Lombardy poplar. The roar in the village still continued, and the flames and smoke rose high in the air. Then a party of horse rode up, and David saw the barrier being cleared away; evidence enough that safety only lay in flight, and for three more weary miles he and his three followers urged their flagging steeds to greater efforts. Passing over an open *karewa*, and coming to a hamlet it seemed as if the pursuit had come to an end, and they dare halt to give their horses a drink and buy some milk for themselves. A few minutes for thought and further plans was a necessity.

His reflections were not cheering. Yar Khan and the rest of his followers were either killed, captured or had escaped in other directions; and it was impossible to get touch with them. Every instinct urged him on to the city to see what had become of Miriam, and how he could serve her. There, there might be some troops still faithful to the Afghan ascendancy, and if not he would, at any rate, be able to do or arrange

something. So to the city they would go ; but if anything of use was to be done, fresh cattle was a necessity, and fresh cattle was an unlikely happening. Then up spoke Gul Jan, the orderly wise among men, and said—

“ Your Honour, do you not know that that old Afghan *sirdar* of the Suddozai family lives near here. He is much too careful a trimmer to help you with men or anything likely to get himself into trouble with the Toork faction, but he will give you fresh horses for love of Salabat Khan. His residence is not a mile from here, and this is his land we are on.”

So as David knew the name, and had seen the old man in *darbar*, he decided to clutch at this opportunity, and led the way over the *karewa* to the house of Sayad Ali Khan Suddozai, a cadet of the clan royal of Kabul. Gul Jan's acumen was not falsified. The old *sirdar* knew more of David than David did of him, and had a genuine affection for Salabat Khan and all who served him. He promised them fresh horses and spread a meal before them. But their demand for news from the city he could not gratify. After eating it was decided to rest there till later in the afternoon, so that they should reach Srinagar after dark. It was past four and the shadows lengthening when Sayad Ali woke his guests, and announced their horses at the door.

“ If you want information from the town,” said he, “ you will find that Allah Visayah, the famous courtesan of the Thunbi Bazaar, is at her *jhok*—my boatmen say she came down by *shikara* * half an hour ago. If you ride by, you will get news, I dare say.”

Mounting their horses, and thanking the old man for his kindness, David rode straight across to Allah Visayah's *jhok*, on the banks of the Sindh, and without ceremony rode up to her verandah. The lady was sitting outside nursing a child.

* *Canoe.*

"Tell me what has happened in the city?"

Allah Visayah looked up, and saw a handsome enough man, indeed, she knew him well by sight, and all about him.

"Happen enough," said she. "The Lord Altamish is proclaimed Governor, and he has occupied the treasury, and by now the Shergarhi."

"What of Salabat Khan's ladies?"

"What do I care about them? No doubt the Lord Altamish and that old Afghan renegade, Daoud Shah, has them by now. Men said he was to have that Miriam. If I did know, I would hardly tell a stranger either, not unless it was worth while."

David was not in the mood to stop at trifles. "Dismount, Gul Jan, and come here."

Gul Jan obeyed.

"Take that child, and get on your horse."

Gul Jan again obeyed.

The mother sprang fiercely to her feet. "Give me that child at once . . . oh, sir! give me that child!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind till I know all you know of the Lady Miriam."

"What should I know more of your precious Miriam?"

"You know all the news of the palace. If you do not tell me more, you shall never see that child again. I have no time to waste. Pinch that child, Gul Jan."

The child woke and yelled with pain.

"Oh! cease, cease torturing my child. I only know that that old Feringhi *padré* was going to take the ladies up towards Islamabad, and I lent him a boat."

"Give the child to the woman. Here, woe betide you if it be false news; take this gift for the child," and he tossed her a small chain with a silver charm. "Get mounted, all of you; about! canter!" and they hurried down to the ford on the Sindh, and rode on and

on through the evening towards the gardens of Srinagar.

A couple of miles outside the city, just as the sun had set, two horsemen came out from a grove, in which they had evidently been hiding. Gul Jan recognized them as belonging to the palace guard; and calling to them, was told the whole pitiful story of the death of Inayat Ullah, and the treachery of Daoud Shah, and once again David swore a deep oath of vengeance should opportunity be his. The story of the departure of the ladies with the Abbé was confirmed, and one of the two men offered to join David, an offer gladly accepted. So they rode on till past midnight, without going through the city, and halted for the night in a willow grove on the banks of Jhelum, eight miles as the crow flies, above the city, and half a mile or so from the high-road to Islamabad.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN

ABOUT the hour that David was escaping from Pulpattan, the Abbé and his novel cure were paddled briskly away from the Shergarhi, and then across stream to the tow-path, where three of the crew had harnessed themselves to a tow-rope to proceed steadily up the river. The noonday heat shimmered on the water and the ripples muttered drowsily under the prows, and the anxious ladies dropped off to sleep; only Miriam coming out from time to time to talk with the *padré*. The countryside was dreamily peaceful, and they attracted no notice from the peasantry or other passers-by on the water, as they pursued their way. After some hours' steady going they pulled up under a chenar tree to rest the men on the towpath and obtain some milk and fruit. Ripe baskets of cherries and apricots were offered for sale, and the Abbé found himself among friends; for an old lady on the bank eagerly told how she had been to Srinagar to have her bad eyes cured by the *padré sahib*. The Abbé made this an occasion to buy eggs and rice, and lay in supplies to add to those they had been able to get away with. Then, just as they were starting again, Allahdad, the Chib rode up, and said that when they had left the palace all was quiet, and that he and his men would now follow the towpath of that winding,

meandering river that gave rise to the world-famous shawl pattern. They would ride on to Bij-Bihara and camp under the chenar trees in the old Mogul garden there ; and suggested, that, if possible, the boat should tow past there at night when no one would be about. That should bring them to Islamabad very early in the morning. While they were holding converse a dull rumble told them that a cannon had been fired away in the city ; but it was not till later that they learnt that it had hurled brave and faithful Inayat Ullah into eternity. They were fortunate, too, in getting help in the towing, and six relatives of the old lady towed them for twelve miles up stream while their own crew slept.

The night was one of peace and bright moonlight, alternated by the passing of clouds and an increasing apprehension of thunder which never came. But the oppression of the night was nothing to the oppression that sat heavy on Miriam. All the happy thoughts of David were overpowered by the obsession of that vision at the shrine of Indra, evil enough when all went well, appalling in their present situation. But at last the night was drawing to a close, and they arrived without adventure at Islamabad, just as the early breeze heralded the approach of dawn. Here Allahdad was again in waiting, having also hailed them once during the night at Bij Bihara. This time, however, all was not well.

" *Huzoor*, we must be very careful, the folk here say that Inayat Ullah has been blown from a gun in the Hari Parbat. Half an hour gone a mounted messenger rode through Islamabad proclaiming a reward of a thousand rupees *chilki* for the capture of the Lady Miriam. Especially had the messenger sent men along the road over the passes to the Punjab by Verinag. We cannot make for there yet. I only know one place

where your honours will be safe concealed for a while. The three ladies must come with us across the *karewa* to the old ruined temple of the Sun at Martand. But the fewer there be the better; especially if we have to take to flight again. The serving women must go back to Srinagar in the boat. At Martand we may lie hid for a few days and then escape to Cheneni over the Banihal. If the worst come to the worst we must go by Kishtwar."

The Abbé spoke for the party. "You are right about Martand, my son, I have often been there, and it is a lonely spot. But can we get food there; and how can these ladies get across the *karewa*?"

"I have arranged for some supplies, and have here on a pony enough for two days, *Huzoor*. I have three ponies here, too, for the ladies to ride. If we get off before daylight, no one will think of looking out there."

"Allahdad, you must be mad," broke in the Bibi Alana. "How are ladies like us to go without our women. Have you forgotten who we are?"

"*Nahin, Sahiba!* This dustlike one knows full well, but as the *padré sahib* will tell you, in war and rebellion, the great folk have to shift like the humble. If your ladyship wishes to escape, these women must be sent away; we cannot move unnoticed through a country with unnecessary following."

"Indeed, Alana," broke in Miriam, "we must do as this good man says; we must let the women go. You and I know well how *Khanuns* of our families have wandered in escapes of days gone by. My mother had many such escapes from Balk and Kandahar. Indeed! Indeed! you must agree."

There was no help for it, and back to Srinagar the serving women went. They had not heard the plans, but lest they should give information they were to go

back slowly, and Allah Visayah's boatmen who were to take them back were told that the party were riding across country at once to cross the Pir by the Shapiyon route. This would, perhaps, mislead pursuers, and the sight of the ladies on ponies gave colour to this idea.

Led by the Abbé, and escorted by two of Allahdad's men, the cavalcade filed out on to the high *karewa* hidden by the maize fields for the first half-mile, and emerged into the open just as the first faint flush of dawn tinged the mountain tops. The wily old Chib then paraded the streets of Islamabad and called loudly for the village headman and the watchman. To him those worthies came running, the call of armed soldiers being best obeyed promptly.

"Ohe headman, *jee*, I bring orders from the great Lord Altamish, chief of chiefs, and friend of the Emperor. You have already seen our messenger. The late Governor is dead, as you all know. Know, too, now that his wives have escaped, taking with them the state jewels and much of the Emperor's revenue. A thousand rupees *chilki* is offered for news that will ensure their capture. I hear they have gone by Shapiyon; but you now go and spread the news in that direction and proclaim the reward. As you hope for his lordship's favour so be zealous, and the tongue of good repute shall be heard in your favour. Stay, I must have supplies at once. A bag of atta and some rice and lentils, at proper price, too, d'ye hear, master headman."

"Noble *ressaldar jee*, all shall be done as you've ordered. I pray you stand in my favour with the new Governor. May a wretch like myself entertain you and offer you the *huga*?"

While Allahdad smoked with the headman, the troopers lolled through the bazaar and drew the supplies required, gossiping the while of events in

Srinagar, and how the change would affect the province. After half an hour or so, when the Abbé's party had time to get well away, Allahdad called his men together and announced his intention of scouring the Verinag road for the fugitives. Accepting the headman's good wishes for their success, they rode out towards Verinag, and behind the willow groves turned off towards Martand. Half an hour's canter brought them up to the slower moving party, to the Abbé's relief, since there was a chance of meeting strangers on the road, unfrequented though it usually was.

Now the great Temple to the Sun at Martand stands four square to the breeze on a lonely upland plain some few miles inland from the river at Islamabad, a relic of the old, old days when Hinduism reigned in the province, and Hindu kings built splendid temples to their gods; before, perhaps, even Prince Gautama, the Buddha, preached his great reformed faith. High up against the skyline its ruined plinths and giant pillars raised their heads, clearly visible for some miles before the travellers arrived there. They found a maze of ruined courts and shrines and cloisters, fantastically carved with images of many gods, spoilt when the notorious iconoclast King of Islam piled his brushwood fires high against the carved walls and dashed water on the red-hot stone till it split in flakes and its beauty could no more be seen. Deserted and imposing, solemn and pathetic, the great Temple of the Sun stands, even as stands the Temple of Baalbeck, where the people of idols have gone down before a people of the book.

On arrival Allahdad and the Abbé at once set about looking for quarters, and found a sheltered court with overhanging cornices and some carved cloisters that made a reasonable shelter and ample seclusion for the ladies. A separate court was equally suited for the

troopers while Allahdad and the *padré* occupied a small roofless room each on either side of the great entrance looking out across the plain, whence they had come. Good fortune also showed them a store of dried maize stalks and hay that some farmer had stored there for his cattle perhaps, on the uplands in winter. The troopers soon collected enough wood for fuel, and Miriam set to work to cook for her sisters-in-law, who now dozed peacefully in the cool cloister. After they had rested awhile the Abbé begged to have converse and Miriam came out and paced the courtyard with him. He told her of Daoud Shah's proclamation, and she shuddered visibly. "Never!" said she, "never will I fall prisoner to any man," and then unfaltering proceeded to discuss possible ways of escape. Ferassa *Sahib* with Yar Khan and all their horsemen, where could they be? Could no one find out? What was the victorious army doing? Had it been destroyed when Salabat Khan was killed?

The Abbé went out to talk to Allahdad, and found that he had intended sending out two of his men and also going with two himself to Islamabad at different times, after dark, lest they should be seen coming from bivouac, to find out the news and get in touch with any of Yar Khan's or Ferassa *Sahib's* men. It was necessary to possess their souls in patience till evening and watch the sun move across the heavens and down to the mountains of the west. But the peace and soft breezes of that upland haven was beyond compare, and Miriam found herself sitting with her Abbé talking once more of their trouble, and learning from his lips the Christian view of death and resurrection and the doctrine of The Atonement. And a very beautiful faith for weary souls it all sounded, delivered softly in the subdued earnest tones and musical words of Jean du Plessis. And ever and anon it was on the tip of

Miriam's lips to ask how she might be of the faith of those who loved pity for pity's sake, and whose God was a God of Justice and of Mercy. But always the instinct born of many generations that a woman had no real part in the faith of the world, held her bound, while the Abbé thought that the hour to pick the ripe fruit had hardly come. But they talked on far into the beautiful cool night, and when Miriam went to bed she went firm in the feeling that all the world lies in the hands of Providence and that not a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed.

The sun was high in the heavens before the tired and anxious ladies rose from their blankets spread on grass, and Miriam looked out to see if the *padré* was visible. Not seeing him in the inner cloister she ventured out into the central ruined court, and saw him with several of the Chib troopers with their arms, anxiously looking towards Islamabad. Through the high porch she could see a party of horsemen advancing, and stayed eagerly to see what might befall. It was not long before one of them, soon recognized to be Allahdad Khan, detached himself from the others and galloped up to the ruin. The party consisted of no less than David himself with his four companions, whom Allahdad's patrol had met riding into Islamabad. David had recognized the Chibs of the palace guard and had eagerly asked for news of Miriam, and they recognizing him also, had gladly offered to lead him to the refugees. From the Chibs he had heard of Daoud Shah's proclamation and ground his teeth thereat. On arriving at the temple the troopers went off to the troopers' court, and the Abbé led David to a secluded spot to discuss and hear what the situation might be before he ascertained if the ladies would see him.

"I must see the Lady Miriam, father, at any rate. Will she see me?"

"Remain here, my son, and I will see."

And in a minute or two the impatient David saw her slender active form come across the plinth and turn into his court. He stepped out of the shadow of the wall and ran towards her. She would have eagerly greeted him ceremoniously, but he would have none of it.

"Nay, dearest, this is no time for ceremony. Here on my shoulder after the manner of the English."

And beautiful, reserved Miriam allowed herself to be folded in her lover's arms, as her English sisters would have done, trembling yet happy and at peace. After a few minutes of happy silence, David sat her down on a fallen block of stone, and told her gently the story of her brother's death and the weary return, with the final *débauché* at Pulpattan, the rise of Altamish and the cruel death of Inayat Ullah. Miriam wept quietly for a few minutes, for the first time since they were first hurried from their security in the Shergarhi. The high spirit soon returned, however, youth and health and strength added to the all-powerful effect of love soon dry the eyes of sorrow. They then talked of Yar Khan and the possibility of his escape with poor Tone the artilleryman, and then of the ladies and their future. The Lady Nur Jan they could soon perhaps convoy safely to her own home, but Alana Bibi came from near Mooltan and was an Alisherzai of the great Duranni clan. To get her there would be a difficulty. Perhaps it would be possible to leave her with Nur Jan till something could be arranged. Then came the case of Miriam herself, and the unthinkable intentions of Daoud Shah. At mention of these Miriam once more nestled close to her lover, and his heart glowed again at the sense of protection that the action invoked. And as she nestled, a very different being from the somewhat masterful young lady who had ridden with

him over the Pir from Baramgalla, an inspiration came to him. Would she marry him then and there, the *padré* would perform the ceremony, and then Daoud Shah would have a different problem before him.

To Miriam, sudden though the proposal was, the great *boulversement* of her affairs had so changed her mental outlook, that nothing seemed unusual or out of place. She was quite prepared to do as David wished. He, the inspiration surging in his head, wrecking little of legal or religious difficulties, left her in the court to look for the Abbé. Jean du Plessis was pacing the central court deep in thought, pondering the news he had received in full from David's companions, of the defeat at Pulpattan. If Yar Khan was killed, farewell all hope for the Afghan faction. If he lived and could get back to the troops returning from Gurais, there was a chance at any rate of an internecine struggle in the valley. The revolution, however, was too complete to make it fitting that there should be a struggle. The province wanted peace and government and had a right to get it. Granted that Altamish governed fairly the change did not so very much matter, though Salabat Khan had been a ruler, such as Eastern provinces rarely come by. As he mused the eager David broke in on him.

"Father! father! I want you to marry me and the Lady Miriam, it is the only way to protect her against Daoud Shah."

"My son, it will take much to protect against that evil being. Please God we shall be able to do it. But how can I marry you? I am a Catholic priest, you are a presbyterian, a heretic in the eyes of my Church. She is a Mussalmani. There is no connection at all, that I can have in the matter as a priest."

"But you are a Christian and can marry people."

"I am a Christian, and so are you; but I am no

priest to you, and such as you by any ecclesiastical canon that will make it possible for me to marry you."

"Is there no way in which it would be possible for you to marry us?"

"It would be feasible if the Lady Miriam were a Catholic. It is true the marriage could not be strictly legal, for I am here under no ecclesiastical rule, and have no proper authority; but it would make the marriage legal enough for you to get it duly ratified hereafter."

"But is it possible for the Lady Miriam to be baptized?"

"It is feasible should she wish it; and should I consider that she has a sufficient knowledge of the Christian Faith to justify me baptizing her."

"Has she sufficient knowledge, father?"

"She has, my son."

"Then did she ask you to baptize her, you would feel justified in so doing?"

"I should, my son."

"Do you approve of our marriage suppose such were possible?"

"My son, I have a great affection for the Lady Miriam, never have I known a truer heart; and believe me, my son, I have seen much of women, of all classes and many races. I have also a regard for you, as a brave God-fearing man. I would rather see the Lady Miriam married to you than to any man. I can say no more."

"Can you suggest to her that she be baptized?"

"I can hardly do that, the request must come from her in all genuineness."

"Then, father, I must see if I can suggest it to her."

And the Abbé resumed his pacing, by no means perturbed at a request which as a matter of fact he had anticipated in some form for many weeks. He was

more immediately concerned with how to get the women away married or unmarried. Then it was it occurred to him that he might go talk with the widows in their court to which he moved, craving permission to enter which after some scurrying was accorded him. Lifting the big silk shawl that then had hung over the ruined doorway, he found the two ladies awaiting him. He first told them of the arrival of David and of the fight in which Yar Khan's force had been dissipated. Then he dwelt on Daoud Shah's search for Miriam, and his obvious intentions towards her, at which the two ladies who now lent much on her were aghast. Then he spoke of the great subject, of David's wish to marry her and their betrothal. The ladies were interested intensely; but wondered how it could be arranged. The patient Abbé gradually worked up to his point. He could marry them were Miriam a Christian, and dwelt on the great support David, with his English connection, would be to them, in their widowed state. Alana Bibi clinched matters, "In the Prophet's name then baptize the lass and marry her, and let's ha' done with it. In my young days a man would ha' carried her off and no questions asked. Women who have no souls may be Mussalmani or Christian, and no one a penny the worse."

The gentle Nur Jan, put her hand on the Abbé's arm and said—

"I have heard much at times of your faith, and the lot of Christian ladies. Baptize our Miriam, and marry her to Ferassa *Sahib*. We know that his mother was a Duranni, too."

The Abbé reassured by their goodwill returned to the main court; and there found Miriam waiting for him, and very gentle and sweet and humble he found her.

"Father! Is it true what Ferassa *Sahib* tells me,

that if I wish you will baptize me, and that were I baptized you could marry me to him by the Christian rite? 'Tis a fine thing for a maiden thus to talk of her marriage! but everything seems upside down."

"Daughter, I would willingly baptize you, for I believe that you are really a believer in all the faith of the Christians, and really long to serve the Son of Man. But I must first satisfy myself on certain points without which it would not be lawful that I should baptize you, and then I will right willingly marry you to Ferassa *Sahib*, because I believe him to be worthy of you and able to protect you."

So it came about that Jean Armande St. Hilaire du Plessis of the Society of Jesus, walked in the ruined cloisters of the Temple of the Sun, holding high converse with a catechumen he was about to baptize, while outside the dry grass on the *karewa* shimmered in the midday sun.

In the space of the great inner court they walked, up and down on the untrod grass, till suddenly they became aware of two figures who watched them from the deep shade of a cloister wall. One was tall and thin, clothed in yellow robe, the other a veiled figure of a woman. The tall figure stepped forward towards the Abbé, and the two looked into one another's faces. The *swami* and the *padré* had such in common. The dark, sad eyes of the former were set like those of the priest in a thousand wrinkles, and each bore the stamp of peace on his brow, as men who held the keys of all the creeds. Instinctively the two exchanged greetings, and the *swami* spoke, as one master to another.

"From the East to the West, in friendliness and in sympathy. I have come intruding where I have no concern, at the request of my companion, to offer the Lady Miriam sanctuary in my garden of the shrine till these troublous times be past."

The Abbé bowed his head.

"Azizun here believes the Lady Miriam to be in great danger, and praying me to help, has brought me in her boat. That boat can pass down the river unmolested. She has the pass of the new Governor of the province."

Azizun had gone over to Miriam and made her a similar offer. Miriam explained the situation to her, while the Abbé followed by the *swami* walked towards them.

"Miriam, this holy man of peace and sanctity offers you an asylum. I have explained to him that we hope to get you out of the province and that you are about to marry my friend, David Fraser. He tells me that he understands little of the outer world, but offers sanctuary now and at any time."

"Let us refuse it with much gratitude. Azizun here has done much to serve me, though I have no claim to her help or her regard."

The Abbé talked long and earnestly to the *swami*, who now and again inclined his head in acquiescence. To Azizun, Miriam explained the ceremonies that were so soon to take place, and then whispered to the *padré* a request that Azizun should stay to witness them.

"Assuredly, my daughter; be it as you will. We can easily find her shelter."

It was a strangely mingled congregation before whom he was to officiate.

CHAPTER XXX

THE HUNDREDTH NAME OF GOD

TIME and space trod close on the heels of love. The Abbé had first thought that both baptism and marriage should take place the next day, but late in the afternoon, Allahdad returned with a patrol from a long reconnaissance. The news he brought was important. Daoud Shah, with a strong party of horse, had been in Islamabad and gone off that afternoon hot-foot to Shapiyon. The passes to the Punjab by Verinag were clear of anything but *khassadars* at worst, and the united forces of the refugees was now enough to ensure safety against any such. It was essential, however, that they should move that night if they were to avail themselves of the opportunity, another might not arise.

David looked at the Abbé and the Abbé smiled back again. The baptism and the marriage must take place early that night as soon as everything could be arranged. Allahdad thought that they should start by ten o'clock, so that there was little enough time to spare. Not that there were many arrangements to make. When the marriage had been settled there had been a pitiful little diving into their small bundles by the widows, and Nur Jan produced a plum silk embroidered bodice for the bride to wear, while Alana Bibi unearthed a set of turquoise and gold head ornaments that had come from her mother who was a

Toorkomani. A marriage even at an hour's notice in a ruined temple, in fugitive guise, appealed to their feminine love of romance. Miriam should have at any rate such pomp as they could contribute, though that was little enough, poor souls! The Abbé soon came in to say that he would carry out the baptism service at eight o'clock, in the presence of her two sisters-in-law and David, and that the wedding should be at half-past eight, when Allahdad Khan, and one or two of David's own men should be present, Nihal Singh and Gul Jan, the orderly, and also Azizun and the *swami*. He would like the maid to be in white or in a white veil, if they had such a thing, for the baptism, and in anything she liked for the wedding.

So, inside, the Christian-and-bride-elect was preparing for two great sacraments of the Church of Rome, and outside the troopers prepared the horses for a long night ride. David, in that strange trance which overtakes men in sudden view of the novel condition of matrimony, paced the courts as one dazed. It was not till the old Abbé came up and slipped his arm in his, that the demands on the wits of the party to ensure escape over the mountain passes to India came back to him. Anxiously, the priest dwelt on the route they must take and the miles to be covered, and then seeing the young man's nerves were steadying, harked back to the coming ceremonies, and the way of them that he proposed. David would stand sponsor to Miriam at her baptism, and immediately that was over, he was to lead her out, and then bring her in once more to the cloister selected for the second ceremony. There was an alcove adjoining, which would suffice for the baptism, and the marriage would take place in the larger court with the spectators round and a fire alight in one corner as a luminant. David gravely bowed his head to the instructions, and then squeezing the old man's

arm in token of his thanks, passed out to the courtyard, where the horses were picketed, to see that his and the ladies' steeds were in good case.

The last hour of the evening dragged anxiously along, till the Abbé came to tell him that all was ready for the baptism. He entered into a small cloistered alcove in the corner of which a dim log-fire burnt, with a heap of dry grass in the opposite corner. On an old grey stone in the centre stood a brass dish, full of water, placed on an embroidered handkerchief, and a smaller saucer, also of brass, filled with the red rock salt of the bazaar. The grey carved walls looked strange in the glow of the fire, the carved figures minus their noses and cheeks flaked off in the fires of the iconoclast king, grinned like hobgoblins and gargoyles, and out, through a distant porch, lay the great grey moor in the moonlight, which played on the shuddering, unshorn grass that the night wind was stirring.

The fining pot for silver and the furnace for gold. Suddenly there broke on that tense, cloistered silence, a silence almost of the grave, a clear, sweet voice, the well-preserved baritone of Jean du Plessis, chanting the *Quare Fremuerunt*, to an old psalm tune that was familiar even to David's presbyterian ear. Behind the priest, walking fearless and steadfast, came Miriam herself, and behind her again the huddled begums, half-frightened at taking part in the ceremonies of an unknown religion. The Abbé wheeled round to the head of the stone block, on which stood the improvised font and the holy water, and pointing to the ground on the other side of the block, bade Miriam kneel, motioning also the begums to stand or crouch by the wall.

David tossed some of the dry grass on to the smouldering logs, and the fitful flames blazed till the red light shone again from the features of the gargoyle idols

on the walls. Quietly and solemnly, as if he had been in his old parish church of St. Marie aux Chenes, the Abbé commenced the beautiful sonorous Latin of the old Catholic sacrament of Holy Baptism. On her knees with her head bowed, and her hands clasped in front of her, the Afghan maiden awaited her admission to the Christian faith while the fire flickered and the gargoyles blinked and waited as they had waited a thousand years and more on the grey Martand Moor.

Then came the questions to which she had learnt the answers :

"Miriam, what dost thou ask of the Church of God ?"

And the clear answer of the maid rose through the roofless chamber :

"Faith."

Then again the insistant question :

"What does Faith obtain for thee ?"

And once again the prompted answer of the initiate mind :

"Life Everlasting."

Then, as David threw more grass on the fire, the priest came round to where the maid knelt, and breathing thrice on her face, pronounced the exorcism of evil spirits, the solemn phrases fitting well the memories of unholy rites invoked by the idols round.

Loud and clear rose the exorcism till it echoed through the cloisters :

"Eri ab ea, spiritus immunde et da locum spiritui Sancto Paraclito. Ergo maledicte diabole recognosce sententiam tuam, et da honorem Jesu Christo."

Making the sign of the Cross, the priest placed the blessed salt in the devotee's mouth.

"Receive the salt of wisdom. Let it be to thee a propitiation unto life everlasting."

When the veil had been removed from the still

kneeling girl and the holy water poured thrice on her head, once again the beautiful language of the dead builders of a distant empire filled the chamber.

"Ego te baptizo in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti."

Then David came and knelt by the side of Mary that was Miriam, and as the blessing ended led her away to her own cloister, whither scuttled the begums to take their share in the propitious work of dressing the bride for the bridal. To which ceremony was admitted also Azizun the dancer.

In the larger chamber adjoining, the Abbé had made the preparations for the wedding. The brass dish and the embroidered handkerchief he had placed on a similar stone and fires blazed as before in the corners. Allahdad Khan the Chib, Nihal Singh the Rajpoot, and Gul Jan Duranni had been summoned and stood solemn and immovable fully accoutred against the wall. Opposite them were the begums properly veiled, and with them, Azizun, in her softest mood. And the *swami* who had little enough to do with marrying and giving in marriage looked on from his puckered eyes with the glance of understanding. It had been arranged that David himself, should lead in his bride, while the Abbé waited for them at the head of the improvised altar stone.

Thus in due form was David Fraser of Lagg joined to Mary, his wife, in Holy Matrimony, while the fire-light flickered red on those gargoye heads in the temple of—

*"The God of the sensuous fire
That moulds all nature in forms divine."*

Red danced the fire on the light loves carved on the temple stones, as the Latin rolled again :

"Ego Conjungo vos in matrimonium, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen."

Then after the holy water, while the begums and the soldiers wondered, and the *swami* understood, came the exhortation :

"Oremus ; Respice quaesumus Domine, super hos famulos tuos, et institutis tuis, quibus propagationem humani generis ordinasti benignus assiste, ut qui te autore junguntur, te auxiliante servantur, per Christum Dominum Nostrum. Amen."

Outside the saddled horses champed a chant to the blessing :

"Benedicat vos, Omnipotens Deus, Pater, Filius et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen."

The beautiful ceremony over, beautiful in the rich Latin, solemn in that striking setting, David Fraser of Lagg, escheat since the '45, and Mary his wife, left the cloister, and waited in the court, where there came to them, Nihal Singh, Gul Jan, and Allahdad the Chib. Each stood square before the pair, and with that wonderful gift of tongues in which the East is so blest, took first his, and then her hands in theirs, and offered their felicitations. Tears of happiness and content stood in Miriam's eyes, her heart stirred to its foundations at the faithful, respectful sentiment in the grip of those rough warworn hands. Now and again it is given to men to take the hearts of others from their place, and restore them stimulated and strengthened, and the homage of the three warriors of divergent races, took out and stirred the hearts of David and Miriam to mighty resolutions. And behind them, huddled in the shadow, stood the widows, weeping quietly, not at their own loss and sorrows, but in sympathy at their sisters' fateful day. Azizun, the dancer, clasped the hand of Miriam, the bride, in silent sympathy for a lot that might not be hers.

For a minute, the Abbé stood watching the subtler sex murmuring : *"Jouis de la vie avec la femme que tu*

aines" from the wisdom of Elohim, and then had perforce to break the thread of the scene.

"Children, we must now to horse. Allahdad has told us that we must lose no time. Permit me!" and offering his arm to Miriam with all the old-world courtesy of the *Ancien Régime*, he led the way to the centre court, where troopers held the saddled horses. The two begums were hoisted on to the quiet ponies provided for them, and Mistress David Fraser helped on to hers. Then Allahdad and the Abbé leading, with the ladies in the middle and David at their side, the cavalcade set out in the moonlight for a ride of uncertain length and possible peril, while Azizun and the *swami* made their way to their boat. The change from the deep shadow of the ruin to the tense almost fierce moonlight of the moor, unloosed the tongues and both ladies and escort commenced to converse one with another, till Allahdad rode back along the line to urge silence. It were well that no wayfarers should have ken of their presence.

So they rode away silent again into the night, with no sound but the thresh of the horses' hoofs in the grass and the occasional rattle of a sabre, with now and again the hoot of some frightened owl. For some miles the route lay across the plain, till at last the outlying gardens of Islamabad were reached. Skirting the village, Allahdad headed for the conical hill above Verinag, past tall poplars and orchards of apricot trees, and over streams and irrigation cuts, on, past tall double storied peasants' huts and the spires of woodland temples. After two hours' trot-and-jog, the party halted for a few minutes and the men dismounted. The night had changed, and the unusual warmth denoted storm. Great black clouds half obscured the moon, and distant lightning flashed across the summer sky. David and Allahdad spoke of the weather, and

decided that they must push on as far as possible. The storm might not come, and at any rate there was a farm where they might shelter, five or six miles on. The party pushed on in anxious silence. Heavy rain would make it more than difficult to climb the passes. For several miles the road lay through gardens and fields, past the old Hindu palace and sacred pool of Verinag, where the Jhelum river rises from out the mountain side. The rumble of distant thunder and the flashing lightning added to their speed, and at last the road began to ascend, winding and zigzagging up a deep dark gully. Half-way up they passed a couple of huts and a small bazaar, and here Allahdad stopped, just as a loud clap of thunder proclaimed that the storm was on them. Up to the right, he said, turned a path up the spur to a large walled farm and homestead. Here the ladies and the *sahibs* could get shelter, he knew the owner well. He would take them up and leave his own men to shelter in the bazaar. Down came the rain as he spoke, and the ladies were hurried off up the cobbled path to the homestead, with the *padré* and David's own four men. The road wound up through a deodar forest, and the rugged straight trunks stood out from time to time to the flash of the lightning, while the thunder re-echoed up the gully. Ten minutes' climb brought them to a massive mud-built thatched house and courtyard, a welcome haven at the commencement of a wild night. Allahdad succeeded in rousing the owner, who readily admitted the travellers. In a very short time the begums were installed in an inner room, to crouch in each other's arms in one corner to listen to the storm, while Miriam slept in David's arms in the other, utterly worn out with the strain and excitement of the day. Nihal Singh and the others of David's men, slept in the verandah, and with them remained the Abbé, while Allahdad

returned to his own party in the bazaar, where they and their horses could obtain shelter.

Sleep, well-earned, took control of the party, and the confident Chibs slept without a sentry, the end of which is death. The storm died away in the small hours of the morning, and it was close on four when the Abbé woke with a start, the sound of a pistol shot, of which he had dreamed, ringing in his ears. Phew! How vivid the report had seemed to him, and then as he listened, another! This time there was no doubt about it, down in the little bazaar. The Abbé got up, buckled securely to his side, the rapier he had been carrying since he left Srinagar, and walked to the gateway of the courtyard. It was a glorious morning, with a hint of the false dawn, and a soft breeze through the dripping cedars. He could hear voices down in the bazaar. He returned inside to wake, gently, the others, and then went back to the gateway and looked out. The thunder was still rumbling in the distance, and sounded as if the storm might return. Heavy thunder clouds still hung over the tops of the deodars, to the west, and the setting moon shone clear below them.

As the Abbé looked and listened, suddenly, from behind the trunks of the trees, there rushed at him half a dozen men, followed, immediately, by as many more. Fortunately, the gate of the courtyard was narrow, and the old man had time to throw himself on guard with drawn rapier in the roadway. An old man in a white *soutane* seemed little enough to fear, and three men closed on him. But the iron old wrist had not lost its cunning and nerve. Two sharp passes, and two Toork troopers fell, run through the body, and the third escaped with a burning livid furrow in his arm. The Abbé stamped and shouted, the old joy of battle back in his faded eyes. Half a dozen more of the assailants rushed forward to fall back before

that flashing circling steel, not before a fourth had paid for his temerity. The old man's stand had given time for the others to hurry out with their weapons. Five stalwart pairs of arms were brought to the defence of the gateway, Nihal Singh, the Dogra, leading. The enemy hesitated, till a sneering voice in the rear urged them onward, lashing them with biting jest and jibe. A dozen men flung themselves at the now waiting rapier behind which stood the swords of the troopers. The rapier flashed and circled, the *maitre d'armes* lunged again twice, and two more fell to a weapon they had no ken of. Then again, the cool rasping voice behind spoke, and the outer men in the scrimmage died away and since the courtyard wall was of mud, and but six foot high, on either side of the gateway half a dozen Toorks scrambled over the tops and dropped into the interior. Without a moment's hesitation they rushed in on the rear of the little knot by the gateway, who faced to receive them. As they did so, the Abbé's attention was taken off for an instant and a huge savage rushed in to strike him on the arm with an iron mace, another fired a bell-mouthed pistol into Nihal Singh's face, and the two Rajpoots were cut down. Gul Jan rushed back towards the house, and the remaining trooper, he who had escaped from Inayat Ullah's party, was piked in the eyeball. Three men jumped on the Abbé, his sword arm now powerless, and dragged him into the court, just as David, roused by the shouting, had rushed out of the building, sword in one hand and pistol in the other. Jamming his pistol into the face of a man who rushed on him he fired, only to be seized by two others, who leapt on to him from a-top the courtyard wall, from which a third dropped a huge stone on Gul Jan's head.

Of the seven men who had entered the homestead

an hour or so before, five lay prostrate, David had been seized and bound, and the old Abbé lay half-dazed between his captors, who eagerly waited someone's orders to dispatch him. Standing in the gateway, silhouetted against the red glow on the eastern horizon stood Daoud Shah himself, sword in hand, a sarcastic smile playing round his mouth. Opposite, was the verandah of the house in which lay David and the Abbé, while dragged from the inner rooms in huddled fear crouched the two begums. Standing alone and upright between two Toorks, was the Lady Miriam, otherwise Mary Fraser herself, at which sight the bound David, his arms held with leather thongs, strained and struggled to be free.

As Daoud Shah stood in the gateway the Abbé staggered to his feet. The Afghan smiled again.

"Aha! gentlemen! He laughs longest who laughs last! Is it meet that you should conspire to carry off my bride," and David cursed. The curse of despair.

"What punishment do you consider fit, mistress, for those who dare to carry thee from thy lawful lord?"

And Mary Fraser looked him fair in his bitter, evil face and said:

"Alive or dead I can never belong to an infidel like you."

"Hoity toighty, Mussalmani! dost talk of infidel to me."

"Infidel and faithless to turn against my brother, a fellow Afghan and a Duranni of the Pearl."

"Is that all the trouble? good faith never troubled an Afghan yet," but I have other things to do than bandy words with my bride that is to be. Listen now, you snivelling Christian priest, and you master Ferassa you Afghan half breed. Pharaoh is dead, dost remember? In ten minutes you will both hang from yonder deodar, and you may thank your stars and

my mercy that I flay you not alive for your pains. I will hang your men with you, dead or alive, and these two old baggages also. You, my Lady Miriam, will make ready to return a-horseback with me to Srinagar. Here, Solomani! get ropes round their necks sharp."

The men holding David and the priest produced ropes. The Abbé had faced death too often to dread it under any circumstances, and had little enough desire to crave his life at any man's hands. But Miriam's, above all, was to be saved.

"Ahasuerus of Jerusalem," he began, and Daoud Shah's face changed, and then hardened.

"Old man, best tempt me not, lest I order that flaying. Talk not to me of Jerusalem. Look sharp there, and get those nooses over the branch, lest I hang some of you as well."

The Toork soldiers cast the ropes up over the branch of Cedar *Deodaris*, which is first cousin to Cedar *Lebani*, and David Fraser and Jean du Plessis stood ready for the hanging, while Miriam waited, dazed and motionless, as one in a trance.

The great cloud hung over the west, and the thunder rolled and boomed among the peaks of the Pir Panjal, and the red in the east grew brighter, while in the foreground, between Daoud Shah and his victims, lay the dead and wounded in the fray. Then, up spoke once again, Jean Armande du Plessis.

"Dost remember, Ahasuerus, of the tribe of the Ben-i-Israel? 'Tarry thou till I return,' was the command, but He never bade thee do evil for ever and ever. Is the curse of the Living God so deep that thou canst never abide the good? Spare this girl and this young man, if ever thou hopest for peace at the last. See now! I make the Great Appeal. By the Hundredth Name of God, that thou knowest! By the Scattered Letters and the Day of Atonement! By

the Sign and the Word that thou hast learnt ! behold, I make to thee, the Great Appeal."

As the lightning flashed in the cloud behind the forest spur, Daoud Shah looked and saw Jean du Plessis giving the sign of the Great Appeal that goes with the Omnific Word. By his side, too, stood David, concerned only in how he might get respite to save Mary his wife, making also the Appeal.

Then it was, that Daoud Shah remembered an oath, he that had scorned oaths and compacts and faith between man and man, and man and God; remembered, too, the strange happenings in the ruins of the Great Temple, and how the Roman Eagles had marched in over the ruined walls of Jerusalem, and to his heart there came a glimmer of ruth for the first time for many a long year. Instinctively, he found himself answering the Great Appeal and the Omnific Word, thereby binding himself to save.

"Take off those ropes," he snarled. "Take them off, and take the men and women inside, and let them be guarded." Then, turning his back on the scene of carnage inside the court, he walked out of the gate and up the spur, and stood on a ledge looking into the gloom below. Below him on the spur stood a Toork trooper holding his horse.

As he stood gazing back on the ages and into the eye of the rising sun, a fierce shouting in the homestead broke on his ear. Down the spur above the farm, were rushing sixty or seventy men. They flung themselves into the courtyard, over the walls, and round to the gate. His own surprised followers hurried to oppose them, to be swamped and beaten down. He turned fiercely to his horse, sprang to the saddle, and spurred down to the gate. Towards him rushed twenty or thirty of the new-comers, who had already swept away his own men. Hack and slash and shout again, they

tumbled out from the gateway and at their head that cursed old *wazir*, Yar Khan himself ! His men overpowered, escape seemed impossible, but jamming his heels to his high-spirited horse, he rushed straight into their midst, clearing a way for himself as they fell aside before the impetus. Bursting through them, the level space came to an end, and nothing remained, but the drop over the spur, a sheer precipice, from which peered up the tops of the deodars that grew out from the face of the cliff. The frightened horse jumped wildly into the air, and horse and rider, Zabulon, the arab, and Daoud Shah, of the Ben-i-Israel, his rider, sprang out into space, and then fell turning over and over and over in the gorge below, till lost in the shroud of a rising cloud, "*et la poussière retourne à la terre d'où elle a été tiré.*"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PAX BRITANNICA

So Daoud Shah, the incomprehensible firebrand of the Northern States, disappeared over the cliff into the cloud and mists, and his following melted away before the onslaught. It was Yar Khan, with Tone, Ganesha Singh, and Habib Ullah Khan, who had arrived so opportunely, in time to save the refugees. Yar Khan and Tone had broken away from the ambush of Feroz Tuglak at the village of Pulpattan, and had rallied most of the survivors at the Jhelum ferry. A few Kashmiri villagers had been sent to let the broken ranks know where to collect, and then unexpectedly to them had come Habib, who had been marching the infantry and guns quietly back over the Tragbal. At Bandipura came the news of the successful *coup de main* of Altamish and also of the *débaclé* at Palpattan. The officers had called a gathering of the men and had proposed that as the rule of dead Salabat Khan must be over, they had best join the *de facto* Governor. The body of their late Governor they handed to a local *moollah* to bury, and Habib Ullah and a few of his following decided to ride away and try and rejoin Yar Khan.

The next step for Yar Khan was to learn what had happened to the ladies at the Shergarhi, after which he could decide on some plan. Troopers from Inayat Ullah's following found them and told the tale of the

blowing away from the cannon, and the reason therefor, and the flight of the ladies to Islamabad. Thither then Yar Khan bent his steps after resting man and horse, had come across the trail of Daoud Shah and learnt of the reward that he had offered for news of Miriam. That touched the only really tender spot in the old man's heart. Miriam had found a very soft corner for herself there, more especially since she had shown such grit when David had personated her brother. For David also he had regard and interest, but to rescue Miriam stimulated all his faculties. One way and another over a hundred men were still with him, and with these he started for Islamabad. Nothing could be heard of the refugees, but late in the evening he had again struck the trail of Daoud Shah returning on his tracks and making for Verinag. He had come up as has been related with them at the critical moment in the mountain homestead. Daoud Shah's men surprised and overpowered, were either killed or fled down the spur in all directions, much aided thereto by Allahdad's men, who had been found by Yar Khan, furious at having been surprised and separated from David and the ladies.

It did not take long to release David and the Abbé or restore confidence to the frightened begums. Miriam herself or Mary, as she now was, stood dry-eyed but dazed just where her guards had left her when Yar Khan came into the courtyard, and to that old warrior's concern, had collapsed into his arms. The sun had now risen, and there was plenty of daylight. To make assurance doubly sure, lest more Toorks be about, Yar Khan decided that they must cross the pass at once. Their own wounded they would carry, but their own and the attacker's dead must remain. The frightened farmer promised to arrange for burial if he might keep the arms and appointments and any stray horses.

One dead Rajpoot trooper should be carried with them strapped across a horse to be burnt by his brother Hindus next day. A couple of dozen Kashmiri villagers were impressed from a village down the hillside to carry improvised litters, and by an hour after daylight the whole cavalcade slowly climbed the Banihal pass and crossed the waterparting that separated Kashmir from the Rajpoot territories of the upper Chenab valleys.

Near the top of the pass the border post of *khassadars* had not even heard of the change of rule, and the party passed them without incident, to encamp without interference in a quiet grass valley below the fast vanishing snow-line.

The next day plans had to be settled. Nihal Singh, despite his pistol wound, was able to suggest that they could stay and rest men and horse at Cheneni. The Cheneni chief was a Mian Dogra of the same clan as himself, and his word would be taken that they would be peaceful visitors. Cheneni was two marches on across the Chenab. Thither Yar Khan proposed, therefore, to go. Allahdad should then take the begums from thence to the Lady Nur Jan's own home in Chibland. David proposed to reorganize his own *rissalah* with as many as would follow him, while Yar Khan intended to return to Kabul with any men who would go there. David, balked of the career that had seemed to open for him in Kashmir, would take his *rissalah* and offer it to the British Government as he had learned that James Skinner had already done, and if not, he would ride through again to Central India. The Abbé, much shaken by all that he had gone through, would at any rate stay with them for a while.

So, through to Cheneni they marched, and the chief there, after hearing their story from Nihal Singh, put

a commodious old *serai* at their disposal, and sent out tents of all kinds for the accommodation of the ladies. For a whole month in great peace they rested, during which time Mary recovered wholly from her shock, while the tired horses improved daily on the sweet upland grass. After five or six days, the begums moved away with Allahdad and four of his men through Poonch to their destination, leaving Mary and David with many tears and protests. The remaining Chibs elected to stay with David. Yar Khan at the last moment had promised to turn squire of dames and to come and take the Alana Bibi away to her own home among the Mooltanis. He then stayed a week more to rest his horse, and rode off at last with twenty men and many protests of affection. Miriam even went so far as to prophesy that he would marry Alana Bibi and go manage her estates, at which they both laughed heartily.

For three weeks more David and Mary his wife lived alone in intense happiness in the comfortable tents that the Cheneni chief had lent them. Habib Ullah had declared his intention of staying with David as second in command of his *rissalah*.

David still had left, fortunately, one of the Begum Somru's original hundis, and was able to obtain from a banker in Cheneni enough money to maintain his men at any rate for two or three months. It would be necessary to repay that lady later, since the cataclysm in Kashmir had put it out of his power to serve her interests there, but that must wait; the means of existence were the first consideration.

The Abbé lay in a tent close by, devotedly nursed by the faithful Tone, who had constituted himself the old priest's henchman, and gradually regained the use of the injured arm. One day David came back from a demonstration against a recalcitrant vassal of the

Cheneni Rajah to find Mary much distressed. With her sat the Abbé.

"David, the *padré* is going away, going back to Kashmir."

"What is this, *Padré*? You are surely not going away from us after all you've done for us."

"My son! Children! Thanks to this dear lady's care I am now restored. I must about my work. Can I idle my life through? Would that be right for a priest of the Society of Jesus? Rather must I be doing at once. I am going back to Kashmir, children. There cholera is raging, and the people will look for my remedies, poor though they be. Besides, it is all selfishness. Work I must do and preach the faith in due season. Where better than in that beautiful valley which I love so well, despite the troubles we've just come through. All my connection with the world lies in you two, or in old unhappy far-off things. I see you happy and safe, and my Mary here in good hands, so back I will go to my cure, and you would not hinder me."

It was true enough, they could all see it. The *padré* must to his preaching as the shoemaker to his last, and where could he preach better or to more need?

"Your riverence, I will come back too," cried Tone, who had come to the tent door as the Abbé was speaking.

"You, my son. Why?"

"For why? First, because I am not going to leave you, and secondly, because I know that Altamish will give me service. He will trust me. All Hindostan knows that the soldier of fortune is true to his salt."

Lucius Tone might also have added that he mourned also for that beautiful inlaid cannon the "*Iqd-i-Gul*" which called him back, and was keeping a niche for

him in the artillery service of Altamish, newly-made Governor of Kashmir. The gunners, too, whom he had trained with such care were there also. Like the cat, he was faithful to the house and not to the master. Where gunners were wanted, there would he be. It was by no means certain that David could employ him in the future.

"Very well, my son, it will be much joy to me to have you in Kashmir. If you march back with me, so much the added pleasure."

And so it was all fixed. The Abbé was right. Miriam was absolutely and entirely happy with her man, studying so far as any one could help her, the spirit of her new religion, and the ways of thought of the English. Their tents were homelike, for a few of the bright dyed saris from the bazaar had changed the bare tents to cheerful bowers, and the Abbé was well content to leave her thus. During the few days he was to remain, the old man would sit for hours with his convert regaining strength, teaching her and talking of *La Belle France*, and all the memories he held dear. Each day David drilled and redrilled the *rissalah* to a pitch that he hoped would attract Lord Lake's immediate attention. Several young Mians of Nihal Singh's clan had joined and were shaping into first-class troopers. Ganesha Singh made them his special charge, and as that old man's fire had all returned with rest and satisfaction at rejoining his *Sahib* after the *débaclé* in the hamlet of Feroz Tuglak, so the Hindu troopers were all in good form too.

David had asked nothing better than that the *padré* should amuse Miriam the long mornings when he was away with his men, or making expeditions on behalf of the Rajah, and it was with regret that he saw the time for his departure draw nigh. But

the old man was not to be persuaded to stay longer. With returning strength came returning zeal, and there was little enough reason to attempt to detain him. He was a wanderer on the face of the earth, busy only in his Master's business. He must do somewhere in India that which he had done in Kashmir, and where could he more fitly work than in that beautiful snow-girt valley? As the loadstone points to the northward, so pointed duty and the Holy City to Armande du Plessis.

Since the Abbé would go, go he should in comfort, and a litter would take him over the pass with a riding mule led behind. Tone would have a suitable horse from the troop, and one of the men had offered to go back too, as orderly. The night before they set out the Abbé supped with them, and sat long watching the happy pair starting on their life together. Ah well, it had pleased God to send him to another life, and he prayed always that he might do his work in the place to which he had been called, till *La pousière retourne à la terre d'où on l'a tiré*. But all the man within cried aloud in sympathy to that happy, contented scene in the muslin-hung tent in Cheneni. Miriam, beaming with happiness, looked radiantly beautiful, there was no doubt about that, beautiful as "The face that launched a hundred ships and burnt the topmost towers of Ilium." May peace and happiness ever be theirs, prayed the old man, and he remembered the passages from Ecclesiastes that Daoud Shah had once quoted so glibly—

"Jouis de la vie avec la femme que tu aimes, pendant tous les jours de ta vie de vanité que Dieu t'a donnée sous la soleil."

Was Koheleth right in calling it all vanity? Surely, thought the Abbé, these two, this boy and the maid, may live a life that is not to be vain. Then as the

evening slipped away and Tone came in to sit with them too, it soon grew late and the old man withdrew with the Latin blessing for the last time, *Benedicat vos, Omnipotens Deus, Pater, Filius et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen.*" The next morning they made an early start with not only David and Mary, but the whole of the *rissalah* there to do them honour, and every man insisted on placing his hands in those of the Abbé, after which they watched the small cavalcade wind away up the hillside for several miles.

So Armande du Plessis passed away out of their sight and for three weeks more the happy couple remained in that upland paradise, and it was a very polished squadron that marched away down to the plains. The heat, however, grew considerable, and at Jammu David accepted an offer of a cantonment at Udampur till the rains were over, coupled with free grass for his horses in return for keeping off certain hill raiders. Early in September he started down through the Punjab once again strong enough to go unquestioned along the great highway till at last he heard that the British were camped a march away. With them was the great Commander-in-Chief himself, Lord Lake of Laswarie, still fighting for the peace of the countryside against all the disintegrated forces that survived from the Great Anarchy. There for the first time David saw a regiment of British Light Dragoons fresh from the famous pursuit of Holkar, and now bent on hustling the raiding Sikhs north once more, and with them regiments of irregular horse, row on row of serried battalions and a horsed artillery.

Straight into the camp rode David, demanding audience of the Chief himself, which he promptly got. He at once asked for service and asked leave to parade his *rissalah* for inspection. The general

taken with the young man's face and bearing and his history of events in Kashmir, calling on James Skinner his prince of irregulars to come too, rode out then and there, to see David's men on parade. A right good show they made, and he offered to take the lad on and put him and his horse in charge of a district till he learnt the Governor-General's pleasure.

So David and his wife marched away to take over the administration of a province that was to be managed and pacified after the manner of the English. Before long there came an order from the Governor-General authorizing him to raise his horse to three hundred troopers and confirming him in the position of a permanent officer of local irregulars, concerned especially in spreading peace in the land.

How David squared accounts with the Begum Somru and repaid her loan, and how that lady offered to marry him and wipe it all out, and how the indignant Miriam sold her own Kashmir sapphires to enable him to repay it forthwith, need not be told here. Nor how Yar Khan, the scorner of women, did actually, as Miriam had prophesied, marry the Alana Bibi, acquiring incidentally her estates thereby. Nor again how the British pacified all Northern India except the Punjab, and bowed out or took into their service all the freelances, for that is another story too long to tell here. This story as it stands, has but told how one young freelance, taking fortune by the hand, sallied forth to carve a career. How finding his way over the snows to Kashmir, there met his lady-love, as many have done since, fought for her and bore her off in triumph from that strange wanderer in the guise of the Ben-i-Israel, who had been the stormy petrel of the waning anarchy till it faded into the Pax Britannica and the ever reddening map. That map the Ferassa *Rissalah* helped to redden for over half a

century. Then there blew the Great Wind, which swept away in a night half the old army of John Company, regular and irregular, and incidentally the glory of a hundred years and the Ferassa *Rissalah*. To its eternal honour and that of Crawford Chamberlain its commandant, the parent *rissalah* of old James Skinner remained, a monument of faithfulness and a memory of the Freelance.

THE END

